The Transactions of the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society
Volume 10 (2010)

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The Transactions
of the
Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society

The original talks from which the main articles in this journal are drawn were presented at the annual gathering of the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society held at Brentor and Lewtrenchard in Devon over the weekend of 26th/27th September 2009. The final item was held over from the 2004 meeting and is published here for the first time.

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Articles for publication

Articles for publication are welcomed. The main categories of material published in this journal are:

- Papers presented at the SBGAS Annual Meeting
- Original essays on aspects of the life and work of Sabine Baring-Gould
- Reprints or transcripts of hard-to-find published material and manuscripts written by or about Sabine Baring-Gould

If you wish to offer a piece for publication, please submit a brief description to the editor by e-mail at the address above.

Articles should be submitted as electronic documents in a format that can be read in Microsoft Word. Illustrations should be sent as separate files. It is the responsibility of authors to ensure that copyright permission has been obtained (in writing) for the use of any text or illustrations used in the article, other than short extracts quoted within the scope of ‘fair use’ provisions.

A style/format guide is available from the Transactions Editor on request.
Introduction

The annual meeting of the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society in September 2010 featured an exploration of the area around Brentor, on the North-West edge of Dartmoor where his ghost story, *Margery of Quether*, was set.

**Roger Bristow** has prepared a brief summary of the bibliographic information relative to the novel, as well as the summary of the localities associated with the novel that he presented at the meeting and many of which were visited during the weekend.

**Jane Marchand** has provided an interesting overview of the archaeology of Brentor. For those who were present at the meeting this was supplemented by an interesting visit to the site where she showed us many of the features described in her talk.

**Troy White** gave us a very interesting perspective on the story, which forms part of the doctoral dissertation that he is working on. The idea that *Margery of Quether*, and indeed aspects of Baring-Gould’s life, are set in an ambiguous boundary area is a compelling one.

For the second day of the meeting we returned to the familiar ground of Lewtrenchard, where three papers on other topics were presented.

**Ron Wawman** has continued his studies on Baring-Gould’s life, as it is revealed by recently discovered letters and other papers. The picture he presents is revealing and, sometimes, poignant.

**Martin Graebe** talked about Baring-Gould’s work as a folklorist, demonstrating how stories overheard as a child led him to the study of mythology and, ultimately, to collecting songs in Devon and Cornwall.

**Joanne Parker** talked about a particular part of his work on folklore – the ‘Book of Werewolves’. This was one of the first modern studies of werewolves and Joanne explained how it fitted into the scheme of Victorian literature.

Finally, an extra paper from our meeting at Cambridge in 2004.

**Norman Wallwork** has contributed the sermon that he gave at the service held in Claire College Chapel during our visit. This examines Baring-Gould’s hymn, ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers.’ And the changes in the way we see it in the modern world.

Thank you to all the authors. This is the biggest issue of the SBGAS Transactions since I became Editor. I hope that you will enjoy reading it.

Martin Graebe

February 2010
Margery of Quether –Bibliographical information

Margery of Quether was first published anonymously in 1884 in the Cornhill Magazine, New Series, Vol. 2, p. 337-360 (April) and p. 466-485 (May); Illustrations by Harry Furniss. (Sold for £40 29 Sep., 1883; money received 18 Jan., 1884 [from Baring-Gould’s Diary]).


Colonial edition, 1891. [date uncertain]

As 1891, but cheaper (2/-) edition with paper-covered boards.

‘Second edition’ 1898.

Third edition.


Included (p. 1-47) in Richard Dalby’s Margery of Quether and other Weird Tales. (Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire, Sarob Press, 1999).

Reprinted as Margery of Quether with Other Strange and Curious Tales, (Walterstone, Herefordshire, Praxis Books 2009), Paperback , 204 pages.

Roger Bristow

St. Michael de Rupe, Brentor
Margery of Quether - Localities

Roger Bristow

In the following account, pagination is given as (p. A/B) where ‘A’ is from Richard Dalby’s *Margery of Quether and other Weird Tales*, 1999, Sarob Press, and ‘B’ is from Becky Smith’s *Margery of Quether with Other Strange and Curious Tales*, Praxis Books, 2009.

**Blackdown** (p.2/3). [SX 495 805-520 825] NE-SW-trending ridge north of Mary Tavy. In Cornish, Rosedhu (see Brinsabatch below) is supposed to be Black Down.

**Brentor** (= Brent Tor) [SX 471 804]. A prominent hill rising to 334 m [1096 feet] capped by the 13th Century church of St Michael de Rupe in which lived Margery of Quether. The hill is commonly described as a volcano, but although it is composed of volcanic rocks, it is not the neck of a volcano.

(p. 3/12) Although small, the church has a ‘... chancel, nave, porch and west tower like any Christian parish church. There is also a graveyard around the church. This occupies a little platform on the top of the mountain, and there is absolutely no room there for anything else. To the west, the rocks are quite precipitous, but the peak can be ascended from the east up a steep grass slope strewn with pumice.’ See the description under the Cox Tor heading.

(p. 3/13) ‘You must understand that there is no road, not even a path to the top; one scrambles up over the turf, in windy weather clinging to the heather bushes. It is a famous place for courting, that is why the lads and lasses are such church-going folk hereabout. The boys help the girls up, and after service hold their hands to help them down.’

(p.6/16). ‘... a narrow ledge between the tower and the precipice, on which two cannot walk abreast, but on which two can stand very well with their backs to the wall.’
The church was not in first-rate repair.

The rain had driven for centuries through the joints of the masonry, even through the stone itself, and had streamed down inside, rotting the joists of the bell chamber where they rested in the wall. ... Brentor is built of the stone of the hill on which it stands, a sort of pumice, full of holes, and therefore by nature spongy. It holds the wet, and weeps it out at every change of weather. Now the belfry joists had given way, rotted right off, and had brought the planking down with them and lay a wreck at the bottom of the tower. By day, I have no doubt, anyone looking up would see three bells, and the holes in the lead roof above them. ... so encumbered was the floor with fallen beams and boards that smelt of mildew and death. ... a pool of coffee-coloured water that had leaked from the roof, and drained from the sodden joists ...

... an old heavy bell ['the cock'] that has a curious Latin inscription on it, which begins ‘Gallus vocor’.

In A Book of Dartmoor (1900), Baring-Gould has the following anecdotes about the church (p. 102 – 104):

'Brent Tor was fortified in a manner very similar to Whit Tor; the outer wall remains fairly perfect on the north side, but the inner wall has been much injured. In this instance it is not the summit, but the base of the hill that has been defended. As there is a church on the summit, as also a churchyard with its wall, these have drawn their supplies from the circumvallation. Moreover, it has been broken through to form a way up to the church.

A late curate of Tavistock, whose function it was to take the service on Brent Tor, and who found it often desperate work to scramble to the summit in storm and sleet and rain, resolved on forming a roadway to the churchyard gate. But he experienced some difficulty in persuading men to go out from Tavistock to work at this churchway. However, he supplied himself with several bottles of whisky, and when he saw a sturdy labourer standing idle in the market-place he invited him into his lodgings and plied him with hot grog, till the man in a moist and smiling condition assented to the proposition that he should give a day to the Brent Tor path. By this means it was made. The curate was wont to say: "Hannibal cut his way through the Alps with vinegar; I hewed mine over Brent Tor with prime usquebaugh." Few traces of this way remain, but in making it sad mischief was made with the inner wall of the fortress.

On Brent Tor summit it is sometimes impossible to stand against the wind. I remember how that on one occasion a baptismal party mounted it in driving rain. The father carried the child, and he wore for the occasion a new blue jersey. When the poor babe was presented at the font it was not only streaming with water, but its sopped white garments had become blue with the stain from the father's jersey.

On an occasion of a funeral, when the parson emerged from the church door he was all but prostrated by the north-west blast, and he and the funeral party had to proceed to the grave much like frogs. "Crook'ly down, sir!" was the sexton's advice; and the whole company had to press forward bent double, and to finish the service seated in the "lew" of headstones.

According to popular belief the graves, which are cut in the volcanic tufa, fill with water, and the dead dissolve into a sort of soup. But this is not true; the rock is dry and porous. It discharges its drainage by a little spring on the north-east that in process of ages has worked itself from stage to stage lower down the hill.'
Brinsabatch (Brinsabach on the map) [SX 482 798]. The name was inexplicably changed to Foggaton in the 1891 book. Home of yeoman George Rosedhu whose forebears had held the land since Saxon times. Baring-Gould based the family of George Rosedhu on the then occupants of Brinsabach as they had lived there since 1559, and prior to that at Kilworthy (q.v.).

Brinsabatch (occupying 356 acres, 2 roods 3 poles (p.8)) is described (p.2/12) as ‘... an ordinary farm-house substantially built of volcanic stone, black, partly with age, and partly because of the burnt nature of the stone. The windows are wide, of wood, and always kept painted white. The roof is of slate, and grows some clumps of stone-crop, yellow as gold. Brinsabatch lies in a combe ... in Heathfield.

(p.5/14). ‘Brinsabatch makes no pretension to be other than a substantial yeoman’s residence. You can smell the pigs’ house as you come near, and I don’t pretend that the scent arises from clematis or weigelia. The cowyard is at the back, and there is plenty of mud in the lane, and streams of water running down the cart ruts, and skeins of oats and barley straw hanging to the hollies in the hedge. There is no gravel drive up to the front door, but there is a little patch of turf before it walled off from the lane, with crystals of white spar [quartz] ornamenting the top of the wall. In the wall is a gate, and an ascent by four granite steps to a path sanded with mundic gravel that leads just twelve feet six inches across the grass plot to the front door. The door is bolted above and below, and chained and double-locked, but the back door that leads from the yard into the kitchen is always open, and I go in and out by that. The front door is for ornament, not use, except on grand occasions.’

(p.5/15) ‘The rooms of Brinsabatch are low, and I can touch the ceiling easily in each with my hand; I can touch that in the bedroom with my head. Low rooms are warmer and more homelike than the tall rooms of Queen Anne’s and King George’s reigns.’

(p.12/22). ‘The lane is stony, wet and overhung [by trees]. Stony it must be, for it is worn down to the rock, and the rock breaks up as it likes and stones itself ... Wet it is because it serves as main drain to the fields on either side.’

(p.13/22). ‘... I could see the beautiful ferns and mosses in the hedge, and the water oozing out of the sides, and the dribble that ran down the centre of the lane and then spread all over it, then accumulated on one side, and then took a fancy to run over to the other side. ... The road rises steeply from my backyard gate to the church porch. When I say road, I mean way. For after one comes out on the moor, there is not even a track.’
Brinsabatch Combe [SX 477 798 to 485 799] (p.3/12). An E-W stream on the north side of Brinsabatch Farm described by SB-G as:
‘... clothed in oak coppice and with a brawling stream dancing down its furrow, Brentor has a striking effect, soaring above it high into the blue air, with its little church and tower topping the peak.’

Cox Tor [SX 530 762] on Dartmoor (p.3). The Archangel hid behind here when Brent Tor church was being built and from there threw a great rock and hit the Devil (who was demolishing the church as fast as it could be built) ‘... between the horns and gave him such a headache that he desisted from interference thenceforth. The rock is there, and the marks of the horns are distinctly traceable on it. I have seen them scores of times myself; I do not say that the story is true; but I do say that the marks of the horns are on the stone.’

Cullacombe (p. 33/41). (actually Collacombe) [430 765]. Former home of the Tremaine family who moved from there to Sydenham (q.v.).

Foggaton. The later (1891) name used by SB-G for Brinsabatch (q.v.).

Heathfield (p.2/12). [around SX 465 795] ‘Brinsabach lies in a combe, that is, a hollow lap, in Yaffell – or as the maps call it, Heathfield. Yaffell is a huge elevated bank of moor to the north-west and west [of Brinsabatch], and what is very singular about it is, that at the very highest point of the moor an extinct volcanic cone protrudes, and rises to a height of about twelve hundred feet [actually 1096 feet]. This is called Brentor.’


Kilworthy (p.33/41). [SX 482 770]. Former home of the Glanville family which passed into the hands of the Duke of Bedford who turned it into a farm. Prior to 1559 it belonged to the Batten family who subsequently moved to Brinsabatch (q.v.).

Kit Hill (p.6/16), Cornwall [SX 375 713] (1094 feet (393 m)). About 13km SW of Brent Tor and can be viewed on a clear day from the top (George’s excuse for taking Margaret onto the narrow ledge at the base of the tower).

Lamerton [SX 45 77] (p.3/13). George Rosedhu claims this as his parish church, but he actually lives (just) in Brent Tor parish. ‘I am many miles [4.5 km SW] from Lamerton, which is my parish church, and all Heathfield lies between, so, as divine service is performed every Sunday in the church of S. Michael de Rupe, I ascend the rocky pinnacle to worship there.’

Mary Tavy church (p.35/44). [SX 509 788]. ‘Picturesquely situated not on the Tavy, but on a little confluent, was barbarously renovated some years ago, but of late much loving care has been bestowed upon the structure, and something has been done to efface the mischief wrought’ (Baring-Gould, Book of Dartmoor, 1900, p. 137). This is where Margery used to go to worship instead of Brent Tor.

Quether (= Quither). [SX 443 810] (p.5/15). For some inexplicable reason, SB-G changed the name of this small hamlet to Quether. There is virtually no description of the locality, but the home of the fictitious Palmer family may have been based on East Quither Farm at the bottom of the lane (the name Palmer does not appear in the 1881 Census). Margaret’s father is supposed to have had a rented limekiln as well as
the farm, but if it did exist there is now no evidence for it (manganese used to be mined in this area).

**Sydenham** (p.33/41) [SX 427 839]. Home of the Tremaine family who moved there from Cullacombe (q.v.).

**Tavistock Grammar School** (p.26/35) [SX 478 741]. Where George Rosedhu was educated. It became Tavistock Comprehensive School in 1959 and later became part of Tavistock College, although the building is no longer used by the College.

**Wringworthy** (p. 19/29) [SX 500 773], Mary Tavy. Originally the seat of the Cake family; by 1882 it was owned by the Carpenter Garnier family. It is built out of Brent Tor stone (SB-G Diary). In the story, Mary Cake married one of George Rosedhu’s forebears (another George Rosedhu) in 1605 bringing with her 53 acres of property. ‘I have the marriage settlements in the iron deeds-chest under my bed, the date 1605.’
Brentor and its Archaeology
Jane Marchand

A church full bleak and weather beaten, all alone as if it were forsaken
(Risdon T 1625)

Bren-Tor and Church, Devonshire - J Storey after S Prout 1804

'It has been said of the inhabitants of the parish that they make weekly atonement for their sins. For they can never go to church without the previous penance of climbing up this steep, which they are obliged to attempt in the lowliest altitude.

In windy or rainy weather the worthy pastor is obliged to humble himself upon all fours, preparatory to his being exalted in the pulpit' (Polwhele R 1806)

There can be little doubt that Brentor and its church have always been familiar landmarks to travellers in west Devon and eastern Cornwall. Furthermore, as the above descriptions demonstrate, over the centuries Brentor has also been the subject of much written description and prints and paintings

Its position on the western fringe of Dartmoor sets it within the context of three special and important places which flourished on Dartmoor’s western side during the first millennium AD.

To the north east of Brentor is Lydford with its Church with an early Celtic dedication, St Petroc (the same as Lewtrenchard) suggesting its origins are very early.
It was a town of some importance in Saxon times, being one of the four boroughs in Devon established by Alfred the Great as a burh forming a defensive system against Viking incursions. It had a Royal Mint producing silver Lydford Pennies, many of which are now in Stockholm Museum showing the success of the Danegeld (a tax levied to pay off the Vikings).

Lydford also still has its Norman ring work, an early form of defence, built on the line of the old Saxon ramparts. This was superseded by the Norman Castle, which in the thirteenth century was to become the notorious Lydford Jail. By this time Lydford had become the capital of the Forest of Dartmoor.

To the south east is Tavistock, where the first Benedictine Abbey in the country was founded in AD 970 and which had many royal associations. In the thirteenth century the monks from the Abbey served the church at Brentor, which most probably was then used as a Chantry Chapel. The Abbey was destroyed during the Dissolution of the monasteries in 1550.

It is very likely that the importance of Brentor actually dates back to pre history and that the church of St Michael was built on what was already regarded as a sacred site in the pre Christian era.

The dedication to St Michael is one of 800 such church dedications in England, these are usually churches situated on high ground and associated with the Archangel who protected all souls. Perhaps the most famous in the West Country are the Chapel on Glastonbury Tor and the medieval Church on St Michael’s Mount, Penzance.

The nave and chancel of the Church date back to its founding in 1130 by Robert Gifford, who held estates in Lamerton and Whitchurch. He gave the church to Tavistock Abbey together with some surrounding land. The present church was rededicated in 1319. The door jambs now above the north door are possibly from the original east window. The sundial on the south wall dates to 1694 and is one of the
oldest in Devon. During the restoration of the church in the late nineteenth century, 40 skeletons were found lying under the floor of the nave, unusually 39 of which were orientated north south, rather than the traditional Christian way of burying the dead to lie east to west.

St Michael’s was first a chaplaincy and then a perpetual curacy, and amongst the clergy who held the living was the Rev Edward Atkyns Bray (1811-1857), who was also Vicar of Tavistock. During his vicariate his curates served Brentor, the most notable of whom was Richard Vyvyan Willesford.

As sole curate he worked long hours both in the church and parish. On Sundays his day began by escorting the Rev Bray up the aisle of the Abbey church for the morning service, wearing buff breeches with spurs under his surplice. Following the service he would cast off his surplice and gallop off to Brentor where he went through the full morning service to twenty souls, half filling the little church before galloping off to take two more services. (Kempe D. 2006)

Although considerable attention had been directed to the church on the summit, it was left to Sabine Baring Gould to give the first written account of the earthworks which lie around the base of the hill

Brentor was fortified in a manner very similar to Whit Tor, the outer walls remains fairly perfect on the north side, but the inner wall has been much injured. In this instance there is a church on the summit, as also a churchyard and its wall, these have drawn their supplies from the circumvallation. Moreover it has been broken through to form a way up to the church. (Baring-Gould S 1900)

Baring-Gould was well familiar with this type of monument. He had written an article for Archaeologia on the remains of an Ancient Camp near Bayonne (Baring Gould 1851) when he was 18. He carried out excavations on two hillforts in Wales, Moel Trigarn (Baring Gould S. 1900) and Tre’re Ceiri (Baring Gould S 1904) and, with the Dartmoor Exploration Committee, excavated the entrance to Cranbrook Castle situated above the river Teign on Dartmoor (Baring Gould S 1901).

Hill Forts are structures which belong to the Iron Age period, i.e. two and half to two thousand years ago. Up until fairly recently they were seen to be the strongholds of local warrior chiefs who secured themselves and their tribes behind tall earthen ramparts, and equipped themselves iron weapons, slings and war chariots. Nowadays they are believed to have been used as meeting places where the local communities came together and where markets and festivals were held. They also offered shelter against wild animals and possible intrusion, rather than invasion, by neighbouring tribes. Their distinctive and impressive ramparts were built more as symbols of power rather than for defensive purposes.
The hillfort at Brentor is believed to date to 500BC and the bank/rampart running around the base of the tor on its eastern side is the remains of what was once a massively defensive rampart up to 5 metres high in places. This is an unusual position for a rampart, they normally enclose the tops of hills, but at Brentor the rampart was built to complement the natural strength of the natural rocky outcrop.

On the western side of the tor where the ground is steep and rocky no ramparts were necessary. The rampart is unusual in that it has no outer ditch on the outside, which would provide the material for building the rampart. There is an inner and outer entrance to the hill fort on the eastern side, these were probably equipped with large wooden gates.

Further earthworks up the slope of the hill which have the appearance of inner parallel ramparts have been quarried for their stone, (referred to ‘as the inner walls much injured’ by SB-G). It is debatable whether these also originally date to the Iron Age.

Even more subtle earthworks located inside the ramparts and further up the slope are quite difficult to see, These seem to form part of an inner enclosure and what are thought to be the foundations of a number of single roomed structures. The majority are in two clusters, ten which flank both sides of what is the modern pathway leading up to the church and about a dozen more which hug the inside of one of the internal ramparts.

Suggestions for the origins of these range from the remains of a Dark Age settlement similar to those found at Tintagel, to being the footings of the stalls/booths of the 3 day Michaelmas Fair. held on the vigil, feast and morrow of the Archangel. This is known to have been held on Brentor for over 300 years between AD1231 and 1550, under the control of Tavistock Abbey and which ended with the Dissolution of the
Abbey. The Fair is seen to be the predecessor to the present annual Tavistock Goosey Fair.

Bibliography:


‘I am called the Rooster’: Margery of Quether, Liminality, and the Gothic Tradition

Troy White

Gothic fiction is a genre commonly understood as terror literature, containing interchangeable parts such as supernatural visitors, spooky castles and mansions, pursued maidens, trap doors, etc. In my own studies I examine Gothic fiction as a genre oddly focused on thresholds. By this I mean both literal thresholds—locked doors, unlockable doors, ghosts stepping through paintings, secret passages between places—and conceptual thresholds—the meeting place of opposites such as past and present, life and death, material and spiritual, reason and spirituality, and so on.

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is commonly considered the first Gothic novel (though there is some questioning of this designation). In the first preface to his novel, Walpole pretends that the story is medieval in origin and was discovered by him. This hoax allows Walpole to maintain a certain amount of distance from his text: he did not write such a strange tale; he is simply presenting it, as an archeologist might present some strange relic from the past.

Once the novel—‘A Romance’ as Walpole subtitled it—met with general approval, Walpole confessed in a second preface, placed after the first, that he had in fact written the story. In this preface he discusses in more detail why he would write such a strange tale.

*It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting, but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if in the latter species Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old Romances. The actions, sentiments, conversations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion.*

*The author of the pages following thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds.* (Walpole 9)

Walpole here is discussing the old Romance of knights, magic, and adventure alongside the modern, realistic novel. We can understand why Walpole initially hid his authorship; his story did seem to be drawn from the past and ‘unfit’ for a modern audience. Nonetheless he did attempt to bridge the old and new styles by populating his fantastic tale with ‘real’ people, as in the modern novel. Each style, he argues, has its strengths and weaknesses.

Later Gothic authors built upon Walpole’s attempt to ‘reconcile the two kinds’ of writing. Subsequent works in the Gothic tradition have, more or less, explored the merger of the real and the fantastic, the modern and the medieval—along with other dichotomies that fit into this pattern. Therefore the Gothic tradition is largely a
threshold tradition, focusing on that point where these opposites meet and spark in their contradictions and connections. Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)\(^1\) – they all spend significant time at the uncertain point between two opposite realities, and this threshold provides an integral part of their settings, plots, and characters.

As I have stated, each side would draw any number of associated dichotomies into the Gothic past-and-present dichotomy; the British audience, for instance, would readily relate Catholicism with old, Gothic buildings while associating Protestantism with the progressive, modern world. Catholicism, being a source of fear and distrust for many, with its strange rituals and shadowy powers, was perfectly suited for the dark side of the threshold, and helped to shape the Gothic threshold as constructed in the British Gothic novel. A common Gothic threshold is one that existed between the ‘enlightened’ modern world of Reason and rationality and the older world of the numinous and darkly spiritual (dark in the sense that it is a spirituality beyond the light of man’s reason).

Baring-Gould himself was a ‘threshold’ man, gaining much of his eccentricity from his motley interests, which seem disparate to the point of outright contradiction. He was in some ways invested in the modern, progressive world of political and cultural reform, ‘the Gospel of Science,’\(^2\) and modern theological and religious ideas. He was equally devoted to the older world of rural cultures, mysticism, the supernatural, and Anglo-Catholic concepts of ancient rituals and Church authority. He felt himself in between these two worlds. As Purcell says:

*Baring-Gould* was himself conscious of [the old world's] passing. 'Almost suddenly, that is to say, in my lifetime, belief in the existence of pixies, elves, gnomes, has melted away,' he said. But for Sabine at least it lingered. (15)

Baring-Gould's Anglo-Catholic pursuits are a prime example of his lingering, threshold position, as the Tractarians felt they were attempting to navigate the Church's proper balance between the errors of Popery and a Protestantism which seemed all too eager to abandon rich Catholic truths. It is easy to see why the Gothic tradition, which deals with the interactions of contradictory worlds, would charm Baring-Gould and shape his fiction. Like Walpole, Baring-Gould was at times annoyed with the ‘progress’ of modernity, and felt that something was being lost in the rapid change.

*Margery of Quether*, while having many influences such as folklore and local colour, is most certainly in the Gothic tradition. It has an integral threshold structure, and in this case we find such a structure in our narrator and the vampire Margery. George Rosedhu's predicament results from his particular positioning between the past and the present (along with the uncertain future the present foretells). He is struggling to

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\(^1\) All of these works, including the misspelled “Marjery of Quether,” are listed in the first review of *Dracula* as of the same family of fiction (*Daily Mail*, 1 June 1897).

\(^2\) See the introduction to *Some Modern Difficulties* (1875).
make sense of it all, being at times incredibly rational, at others incredibly romantic and enthralled with the fantastic.

Mister or Esquire?

‘THIS is written by my own hand, entirely unassisted. I am George Rosedhu, of Foggaton, in the parish of Lamerton, and in the county of Devon. Whether to write myself Mister or Esquire, I do not know.’

So begins Baring-Gould’s Margery of Quether, first published in two parts in the Cornhill Magazine (April and May 1884), a vampire tale centered on its narrator, a Devon yeoman named George Rosedhu. George begins his tale by introducing himself as liminal—that is, on a threshold.3 George, a non-gentry landowner, is unsure of whether to present himself to his reader as ‘Mister or Esquire’; he is titled Esquire by those who desire favors and Mister by those who do not. George's shifting identity, established in the first few lines, is a foundational part of his character and his story.

On the subject of his land, George speaks with more assurance, emphasizing the permanence of his family property throughout the centuries:

I have held my acres for five hundred years – that is, my family the Rosedhus have, in direct lineal descent, always in the male line, and I intend, in like manner, to hand it on, neither impaired nor enlarged, to my own son, when I get one, which I am sure of, as the Rosedhus always have had male issue. (1)

Notice how George is eager to integrate himself, via his land, within the family line: ‘I have held ... that is, my family the Rosedhus ...’. George turns to land and tradition to buttress his self-definition. He is a Rosedhu; it follows that his life will duplicate and perpetuate an ancient and established pattern fixed on the family land.

Yet George presents his land-based security only to immediately question it; a looming threat of drastic change threatens to upset his ancestral confidence:

‘But what with Nihilism, and Communism, and Tenant-right, and Agricultural Holdings legislation, threatened by Radicals and Socialists, there is no knowing where a man with ancestral acres stands.’ (1-2)

George connects his personal uncertainty with ‘the general topsy-turvyism” (2) of the fin de siècle (the late-nineteenth century), which he attributes in emotional rhetoric to the political actions of Gladstone and the Whigs, whose legislation he sees as weakening the class system and posing a threat to the landowner’s holdings. George’s curious, foreshadowing non sequitur, that he ‘may be driven,’ opposed to family tradition, ‘to have only female issue’ (2), indicates his fear that the recent surge of change could pervert and overturn the secure traditions of the Rosedhu house. The

3 Limen is Latin for “threshold.” A related word is subliminal, “below the threshold.” Other terms similar to liminal are “in between,” and “neither this nor that.”
fitting name of the Rosedhu estate, Foggaton, suggests the uncertainty with which George regards its future. The end of the century was for many a time of uncertainty concerning unwanted, seemingly inevitable change, and rural landowners like George were likely to feel this change quite pointedly in land legislation. Many foundational aspects of an individual’s life – political, philosophical, religious, social, etc – were in upheaval and were often seen as connected within a large, shadowy conglomerate of impending anarchy. The old, given way of life was rapidly breaking up, and Britain, like many other nations, was on an uncertain threshold between the old and new.

In a shifting world, George is unsure of where he stands, and he struggles to define himself. He clings to the stability of his ancestral ties above all things, and thus his values are firmly intertwined with the past. In the security of older ways he displays confidence, but a defensive insecurity makes his displays of confidence ridiculous. For instance, though he apologizes for his rude writing style, he quickly turns the blame onto ‘the present taste,’ being:

‘so vitiated by slipshod English and effeminacy of writing, that the modern reader of periodicals may not appreciate [his] composition as it deserves.’ (2)

This give and take of confidence and insecurity, related respectively to past and present, is another display of the liminality that colours George's narrative style throughout; and in general, George's liminality is connected to his forced stance between the desired past and intrusive modernity.

Adjacent to Foggaton is an extinct volcanic cone, Brentor (or Brent Tor), on which is perched the small, dilapidated, thirteenth-century church where George attends services. Concerning the legend of the church’s construction, a supernatural story involving St. Michael and the devil, George is typically liminal: he does not claim that it is true, though he does not deny it (4). He simply states that there are, in accordance with the legend, horn marks on a nearby stone. George's affection for the medieval church is not so reserved; he firmly opposed an architect hired by the Duke of Bedford who so sought to tear it down and build ‘a sort of Norma Gothic cathedral’ in its place. As a result, the church was saved; but, being an anachronism treasured by only a few, it is neglected and falling into disrepair (18). George laments the rotting ‘sacred edifice’ (18) because it is ancient and therefore grounded in principles far removed from the growing uncertainty he associates with his own day. For George, Brentor is a bastion of the past which still stands yet is slowly crumbling.  

George's discussion moves from the church to church-going, noting that the local flock's motivation for church attendance is liminal: piety and services may be the nominal reasons, but people really ‘go for the romp’ – the in-between walk to and

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4 The name for George’s property in the original Cornhill Magazine publication is Brinsabatch, an actual farm in the story's West Dartmoor setting. The farm's owners have burial rights atop Brentor. For whatever reason, Baring-Gould changed the farm's name to the fictional Foggaton by the time of the Methuen publication in 1891. I am not aware of any other changes.

5 In 1889, a few years after Margery of Quether's publication, the Duke of Bedford gave £728 for the ramshackle chapel's restoration.
from church – a time for courtship and gossip (5). George interrupts himself to say that all this information on church-going is ‘neither here nor there,’ a liminal digression. He then reverses his opinion in the very next sentence, stating defensively that

‘...it is not a digression either; it may seem so to my readers, but I know what I am about, and as my troubles came of church-going, what I have said is not so much out of the way as some superficial and inconsiderate readers may have supposed.’ (5-6)

Indeed, ‘digressions’ are the focus of the story, the shifting liminality of George and his narrative being the recurring theme.

The Rosedhu system

Twenty-three-year-old George maintains a somewhat crotchety outlook in order to combat encroaching modernity, and this attitude is very evident in his marriage plans. He follows the sensible and ancient “Rosedhu system,” fending off marriage until age fifty, ensuring him only one male heir so as not to disturb the integrity of just-so Foggaton (10). A suitable marriage candidate has already been selected, Margaret Palmer of Quether (another estate name possibly suggesting uncertainty, quether being a Middle-English word meaning ‘whether ’). She is the eldest daughter of the yeoman Farmer Palmer, very pretty, and hopefully will remain so for the next twenty-seven years.

George and Margaret enjoy their church walks, he being sure to lend a hand over rough terrain and share an umbrella when needed. After one church service, the wooing George leads Margaret behind the church to a ledge under the pretence of a history lesson about distant Kit Hill. As they stand on the ledge, the landscape below is engulfed in an ominous cloud: ‘The effect was strange; it was as though we were insulated on a little rock in a vast ocean that had no bounds’ (8).”

Earlier in the text, George brashly assures his reader that he is ‘a practical man with a place in the world,’ and that when he is gone, ‘there will be a hole which will be felt, just as when a molar is removed from the jaw’ (2). Standing in a boundless fog is a truer picture of the lord of Foggaton's uncertain place in the world.

Seeing only romance in the situation, Margaret says, ‘We two seem to be alone in a little world to ourselves’ (8). George responds in absentminded honesty that it is a ‘preciously dull world and dreary outlook.’ This of course offends Margaret and she leaves directly. While George detests the ambiguity of modernity, his estimation of Margaret’s reaction once again reveals a predilection for his own kind of liminality: Margaret’s ‘little outburst of temper was distasteful’ to him, for ‘it showed an undue precipitancy, an eagerness to drive matters to a conclusion, which repelled [him].’(9)

This statement reveals (as might be expected) a contradiction within George. His chief desire is concluded, fixed stability, yet he must regulate movement towards this goal. This is because a certain kind of liminality is central to the Rosedhu family

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6 This scene brings to mind Caspar David Friedrich's “Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog” (1818), a painting which could be interpreted as depicting uncertainty in a uncertain world.
tradition. The Rosedhu system of marriage is a system of sustaining the liminal courtship, which George describes as ‘the happiest time of life’ (10). Once the couple reconciles, George makes ‘as near a declaration as ever a man did without actually falling over the edge into matrimony’ (10). He is extremely adept at walking a tightrope between absolute definitions (in this case, between separation from Margaret and solid commitment to her).

Nonetheless, the Rosedhu system, despite the emphasis on the liminal courtship, is ultimately non-liminal in the extreme: the strict system, the aim of which is to maintain an exact repetition of the Rosedhu heir and his land, allows for no ambiguity. The system's liminality is actually encased within a set and rigid model. A change which actually threatens the sameness of this system, like ‘Gladstone topsyturvyism,’ or an overanxious bride-to-be, is an evil to be rejected. George likes to have ‘the even tenor of neither [his] agricultural nor [his] matrimonial pursuits disturbed’ (9). He is a defender of the status quo.

A Little Quest into Dartmoor

On the Christmas Eve following the lovers' tiff and reconciliation, George has agreed to ring the bells of the church on Brentor at midnight. He again displays his preference for the past by carrying on his little quest what he is careful to distinguish as a lanthorn (with horn sides, he explains, unlike the glass of the more modern lantern) (16). By the light of his old-fashioned apparatus, George sees a nighttime world that is changed and eerie – a world of the past, full of mystery and the supernatural. As he approaches the church, which is on the border of wild and haunted Dartmoor, he imagines that any nearby travelers might interpret his bobbing light as ‘Jack o' Lanthorn’ or a ‘witches' frolic’ (17). George feels that he is crossing into the world of the fantastic. As in the archetypal quest, the hero is crossing into a strange world, and will return with something magical from that world to bring back to his home world.

Reaching the church, George finds that the belfry is in a bad state, with several beams and boards recently fallen. He clears some of the rubble and begins the bell-ringing.

When George first sees Margery descending from the tenor bell, fear overwhelms him. She is like a grotesque mixture of extreme youth and extreme age: wizened to the size of an infant yet with a hideous complexion of leather. George eventually learns that she is a wretched three-hundred years old, having prayed for eternal life but, unfortunately, not eternal youth. As a consequence, she is cursed with a body that grows ever older and more decrepit, yet cannot die. She can barely see or hear. She has brittle skin and bones. Lately, for protective solitude, she has taken to attaching herself to the church beams with her one remaining tooth and long fingernails, but the unstable old church, which has also endured the hostilities of time, threatens her with broken bones that will no longer heal.

Coincidentally, Margery is an ancestor of George’s sweetheart Margaret. This connection causes some confusion, since the old woman, in her younger days, had
courted one of George’s ancestors who shared his name. She does, in fact, believe George is his Rosedhu ancestor, and chastens him for abandoning her for an older, wealthier woman with land. She tells him, it was ‘a mistake, a gashly [sic] error,’ pointing out the ‘cruel, sour life’ that resulted for George’s ancestor (26). George becomes so deeply affected by her story that fear gives way to sympathy and he resolves to take Margery home for a warm fire and a Christmas meal. As he picks up her tiny body, she instinctually latches on with tooth and nail tightly, as if George were a beam of the church. He allows this arrangement, and continues back down to Foggaton.

But what triggers this ‘sudden access of pity’ (29), which causes George to show compassion to a monster? Ancestral guilt seems to be part of it, and perhaps George is beginning to reevaluate the cold and calculating ‘Rosedhu system.’ There is also his instinct for venerating and preserving the decaying yet, in some ways, stable past. George notes that Margery is an ancient figure who nonetheless will persevere when he and Margaret ‘are fallen to dust, and our lineal descendant in the male line is reigning at Foggaton’ (29). Of course, the certainty of this male line has already been questioned, and it is in the strange condition of Margery that George begins to see both a reflection of his own anxieties and an alternate form of the stability for which he longs.

Cybele Myth
Right before his encounter with Margery of Quether, George rings the ‘Cock,’ a bell with ‘a curious Latin inscription on it, which begins, ‘Gallus vocor’ (20). These words translate, ‘I am called the rooster.’

Why does Baring-Gould include this out-of-the-way detail? He would often insert bits of local information he found interesting in his stories (and sometimes long digressions on a parenthetical topic). A direct implication of the inscription is that George is a Rosedhu rooster, because the Rosedhu system gives him in the straightforward role of producing Rosedhu progeny with no higher purpose.

The term Gallus can also refer to the emasculated priests of the Phrygian goddess Cybele. The possibility that Gallus could refer to this fertility cult and their fertility rites is intriguing, especially since George is so concerned with is land.

This fertility cult was based on the myth of Cybele and Attis. There are many variants of this myth, but a few key elements relating to the rituals of the cult are generally consistent: Through a series of strange impregnations involving gods, hermaphrodites, and trees, Attis is born. He grows up exceedingly handsome, so

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7 George Rosedhu gives us a humourously ironic digression on this very subject: ‘Never before have I taken in hand the tools of literature, and yet, I venture to say that well! there are idiots in the world who don't know the qualities of a cow, and to whom a sample of wheat is submitted in vain. Such persons are welcome to form what opinion they like of my literary style. Their opinion is of no value whatever to me. There is no veneer in my work, it is sterling. There is no padding, as it is called...’ (38).
much so that his grandmother, the goddess Cybele, falls in love with him. He, however, loves another, so the jealous Cybele causes him to go insane. In his madness, he castrates himself and dies beneath a pine tree. Cybele regrets her actions, and Attis is resurrected and elevated to the spiritual plane.

During initiation, the priests of Cybele would sometimes castrate themselves in imitation of Attis, then dress in the garments of a woman. Once a year, on the Day of Blood, the priests would work themselves into a frenzy, and then cut their bodies, splattering the blood on an altar and an effigy of Attis tied to a sacred pine tree. Their blood would assist the dead body of Attis in its resurrection. After a time of reflection, the priests would celebrate the resurrection of Attis, which insured a plentiful crop. Even more important, Attis’ resurrection was a promise that his disciples would also be resurrected to eternal life.

The questions arise whether Baring-Gould knew of the Gallus, and whether he considered them when writing this story. Perhaps not. Baring-Gould was certainly interested in anthropology and religious development. The definitive Victorian text on fertility cults, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which discusses the practices of the Gallus cult, would be published later in 1890. Articles and books on the subject may have been published earlier.\(^8\)

Nonetheless, the possible connection has caused me to consider many details in *Margery of Quether* that I might otherwise have overlooked. George does go through an experience in some ways similar to a Gallus-fertility-cult convert, though perhaps by coincidence.

George’s emasculation begins when Margery latches onto him. He first describes her as feeling like ‘a knapsack slung on the wrong way’ and ‘a tick on a dog,’ but, upon arriving at Foggaton, he describes himself as ‘nursing her’ (30). After a while, Margery drops on his knees ‘like a sleeping infant after its meal’ (31); gradually, in the eyes of George, she is reborn. George shortly becomes absolutely maternal, creating a makeshift crib, providing a bottle, and sleeping in his chair so as to attend to Margery should she wake.

The next morning, before leaving for the Christmas service, George has another look at Margery and notes her effect on him: ‘I felt strangely moved with pity, and with that pity there awoke in me a sort of sense of personal property in old Margery … if any woman had come into my house with her baby in her arms and had asked me to admire it and then looked disparagingly at Margery, I should have hated that woman ever after’ (33). By envisioning himself in opposition to another mother, George makes clear what the awakened ‘sense of personal property’ is, even if he seems unlikely to admit it directly.

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\(^8\) I am still researching whether Baring-Gould was likely to have read anything on the Gallus before *Margery of Quether* was written. Baring-Gould's own *Cliff Castles and Cave Dwellings of Europe*, published in 1911, briefly mentions “Attys, the lover of Cybele,” and “a festival held in his honour.” (265)
During the church visit, George thinks ‘far more of old Margery than of young Margaret’ (34) and declines the Palmer’s invitation to Christmas dinner. Upon returning home, the strange case of vampirism continues. George leans down to kiss Margery and she instantly drives her tooth into his chest and latches on for another suck. George has no desire to resist or defend himself, and he confesses ‘a soothing sensation’ during the feeding (37). At this point, George is completely devoted to the process; it is ‘strange’ at first, but he ‘should soon get used to it’ (37). He even states that, should the ‘Radical Gladstone-Chamberlain Government’ succeed in robbing Foggaton from him, he could make his living as a nurse (38).

Cybele’s priests, because of their liminal state of gender, were referred to both as Gallus and Galla, masculine and feminine. George Rosedhu, by adopting this tradition – by ringing the bell that says, ‘I am called Gallus’ – has transcended classifications to access more stable points of definition. His liminality is exacerbated; he is now both Gallus and Galla, Rooster and Hen, Mister and Mother. Yet George is enabled through this gender transformation to find constancy in his new connection to the Magna Mater, the goddess of fertility, Cybele. Now a mother himself, George experiences the immediate power in giving life, an action far removed from the uncertain brooding over his land. This new ability ‘called into requisition faculties of the mind and heart that had not been previously exercised’ (32), but George adopts the role of mother very naturally.

There is further incongruity in such a ready transformation: George has been hitherto self-centered and misogynistic. Perhaps these off-putting qualities, however, emanate from George’s obsession over maintaining the Rosedhu system and the threat of the topsy-turvy climate, which reduce him to slight paranoia. He considers women to be ‘impatient cattle’ because their anxiousness to marry threatens Foggaton (10). (It could also be that George has envied woman’s maternal role, since he takes to it with such vigor.) Charity is to be avoided because it jeopardizes the social order of master and worker; ‘The man who is universally respected, and obtains ready attention and exact obedience, is he who cares for nobody but himself’ (15). Love and compassion expose the struggling landowner to failure.

The Happy Couple

George finds refuge in the mother-child connection from the ‘preciously dull world and dreary outlook’ that haunted him. He is no longer suspended in a fog-like ambiguity; he has new values, along with new concerns that he is capable of answering. Like a religious convert into the fertility cult of Cybele, George’s emasculation has a given him a sense of belonging, a place in the world.

Margery releases George from his land anxieties. Lineage is no longer merely about preserving ancestral property; George is now directly involved in the maternal caring for the descendent. In a sense, George himself becomes like land, fertile and giving life to a growing crop, Margery. Before discovering Margery, George blamed liberal legislation even for unfavorable changes in the weather, stating:
'We are not likely to have seasonable weather so long as this Gladstone-Chamberlain-Radical topsy-turvy Government remain in power. Our sheep get cawed with the wet, the potatoes get the disease, the bullocks get foot-and-mouth complaint, and the rain won’t let us farmers get in our harvest.' (16)

The government may hinder George’s agricultural interests, but it cannot disturb his relationship with Margery, for they are a world to themselves, established apart from the male system of politics and economics. Also, George is no longer involved in the Rosedhu system of ‘one male issue,’ a repeating cycle, perpetuating the identical deficiencies and disconnection of maleness he has recently identified in his ancestors and himself. As he predicted, George has been ‘driven…to have only female issue’ (2).

Through the sacrifice of feedings, Margery eventually grows into a beautiful young woman as George shrinks into old age and infirmity: ‘as Margery cut a tooth I lost one … as her hair grew and darkened, mine came out or turned grey … as her eye cleared, mine became dim, and as her spirits rose, mine became despondent’ (39). George realizes that he is dying, and begins once again to question the future of his land, having no male heir. He brings this question to Margery, saying ‘What is to become of the Rosedhus? To whom will Foggaton fall? You have drawn all the flush and health out of me and made yourself young at my charge – but I get nothing thereby’ (41).

But this is mere maternal complaining. Indeed, George is rewarded for his sacrifice – he has an immortal and stable lineage in Margery. Margery has decided that she will marry George and inherit Foggaton when he dies. She will then take suitor after suitor and slowly drain them as well. Through this new and improved ‘Rosedhu system,’ Margery offers George the final goal of the emasculated Gaul, eternal life. George does not consider himself a victim; he feels that he is vicariously receiving eternal life, because his essence finds an immortal form in her.

I begrudged her none of her youth and beauty: I took a sort of motherly pride in her growth and the development of her charms, and for precisely the same reasons they were all drawn out of me. (43-4)

George “has no objection to raise”:

‘I freely, willingly submitted to her proposal. She exercised no undue compulsion on me; she appealed to my reason, and my reason, as far as it remained, told me that her plan was sensible, and in every way worthy of her.’ (44)

As the narrator, George is our sole conduit of information, yet we must question his reasoning, ‘as far as it remain[s].’ The peculiar narration confuses his status as a victim; we are forced, at least for a moment, on a threshold: is Margery a monster or a saviour?

Margery and George make an interesting couple, both defined by liminality, both unstably shifting. Together they form two parts of a unit; any change to one affects the other. First, Margery is, like Cybele, an ancestor to George – or she was potentially. Then, George is mother to his child Margery. But, once she matures, the
roles are reversed: Margery tells him, ‘I will nurse you in your decrepitude, dearest George’ (42). Margery and George play multiple roles in relationship to one another. Margery is to be George’s bride, descendent, and immortal encapsulation of his essence. Almost forgotten in this liminal confusion is the underlying fact that Margery is a vampire and George her prey. Because of the complexity of their relationship, vampirism in this story resonates with the specific anxieties and desires of the protagonist.

Margery is able to fulfill the desires of George (stability, a sense of belonging, and purpose) through her supernaturally liminal state. She walks the line between the world of the past and the present, bridging the two and stabilizing the present with securities grounded in ancient principles (the mythic, the mystical, the maternal). She is a pure personification of the past, ‘brought up in the old-fashioned, hard-working, sensible ways of a farm in the reign of Good Queen Bess,’ uninfected by ‘Gladstone-Chamberlain topsy-turvyism’ which causes ‘farmers’ daughters play the piano and murder French, and farmer’s wives read Miss Braddon and Ouida and neglect the cows’ (42). The following description of her liminal character is interesting because it reveals how naively she emphasizes and reaffirms stabilities:

Folks could not make Margery out ... she had never been seen before, and yet she knew the names of every tor, and hamlet, and coombe, and moor, as if she had been reared there. But though she knew the places, she did not know the people ... She spoke of the Tremaines of Cullacombe, whereas the family had left that house two hundred years ago ... On the other hand, what was curious was, that Margery hit right now and then on the names of some of the labouring poor; she would salute a man by his right Christian and surname, because he was exactly like an ancestor some two hundred and fifty years ago. (42-43)

Margery ‘hits right’ when she encounters some antique stability. She is a liminal conductor between the past and present, reaffirming constancy and ignoring change. She resonates in recognition with the poor because, as opposed to the ‘great families,’ they ‘have stuck to their native villages, and reproduce from century to century the same faces, the same prejudices, the same characteristics. They are almost as unchangeable as the hills’ (43). The paradox of the situation is that Margery’s liminal state answers to constancy, and this is true of George as well. We recall that George's family has also produced the same old Rosedhu time and time again (so much so that George was mistaken by Margery for his ancestor). This is not a picture of progress, but stagnancy, which Baring-Gould associates with ‘hell’ in his Origin and Development of Religious Belief (Vol. 2, Chapter 19: The Dogma of Immortality).

Even the name ‘Margery of Quether’ possesses an unstable liminality. Before his vampire encounter, George is warned by his worker Solomon that the moor may be haunted by ‘Margery o’ Quether’; he assumes this is an allusion to the present-day Margaret Palmer of Quether, and that his weakness for her is being mocked. George, of course, chalks up such insolence of the working class to ‘Gladstone-Chamberlain general-topsy-turvyism’ (15). Later, upon encountering Margery, the initial connection is established between her and George through names shared by ancestors and descendents. And, in the end, the liminality of Margery’s name, applying as it
does to both the ancient and modern Margaret, causes their plan for immortality to go astray.

Lost and Saved at theSame Time

In accordance with Margery’s wishes, the banns between ‘George Rosedhu, of Foggaton, bachelor, and Margaret Palmer, of Quether, spinster’ are published (45-46). George notes that, ‘old Margery had overshot her mark, as the sequel proved. She had not reckoned with young Margaret, her great, great, great, great grand-niece’ (46). When the banns are read at church, young Margaret Palmer of Quether naturally believes they refer to her, and that her wedding has been planned without consent. George had grown too aged for services, so Margaret and her father ‘descended on Foggaton, to know of [him] what was meant by the banns – sober earnest or silly joke’ (46).

Upon arriving, Farmer Palmer and his daughter learn the extraordinary truth of the matter from Solomon, as George attempts to follow the conversation with his now feeble senses. Once all is explained, Farmer Palmer declares that, since it is bonfire night, he will fetch the lads so ‘they can have the pleasure o’ burning the old witch instead of a man o’ straw’ (48). George is mortified by the suggestion. Solomon says to Palmer: ‘it is written, ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,’ but I reckon it be against the laws’ (48). To this warning the shrewd farmer responds with an interesting justification based on the fact that there are no public records of Margery:

‘Not at all,’ said Palmer. ‘No man can be had up for burning a person who has no existence.’

George rebuts:

‘But she has existence,’ I remonstrated. ‘That is the prime cause of her trouble; she has too much of it; she can’t die.’ (48)

Farmer Palmer wants Foggaton for his Margaret, the contemporary Margaret. He understands very well that the old Margery’s liminality makes her existence an unstable concept, easily dismissed by reason to his advantage. George attempts to argue her liminality as well, but he posits her on the other extreme fringe of existence (‘she has too much of it’). Nonetheless, rationally speaking, Margery’s dualistic, super-liminal nature (being both past and present) annuls her. The argument of George that he has ‘promised to settle [and thereby stabilize] Foggaton’ on Margery falls on deaf ears:

‘You cannot,’ shouted the farmer of Quether. ‘The thing is impossible. You cannot marry a woman who has no existence in the eye of the law.’ (49)

By declaring the legal void that is Margery, Farmer Palmer disengages the liminality of the banns (referring as it seemingly does to both Margarets) in favor of the modern: ‘There is but one Margaret Palmer of Quether in this nineteenth century; that’s flat.’ Palmer then administers his ‘crushing argument’:
'Now, tell me, is it possible for a man to marry a woman from whom he is removed by from two to three centuries? Answer me that.'

'Put in that bald way,' [George] said, 'it does seem unreasonable; but in these Radical-Gladstone-Chamberlain times one does not know where one stands. All the lines of demarcation between the possible and the impossible are wiped out, reason and fact do not jump together.' (50)

As his desperate, last recourse, George appeals fruitlessly to the topsy-turvyism of his times, his heretofore chief complaint with the world. The instability that once threatened George he now employs to save Margery; the status quo he once fought for he now abandons. In this situation, George suddenly sees another danger of modernity, not in liminality, but rigidity. The modern world, as represented in Palmer, has no room or patience for the fantastic, allowing men to behave like beasts.

George's plea is ignored. Soon the room is filled with ‘men and boys’ with ‘savage delight’ in their eyes (53) and a pyre for Margery burns outside. This mob displays their own terrible liminality: normally, they appear ‘wonderfully gentle, kindly, and free from brutality, and yet—scratch the man and the beast appears’ (55). More so than Margery, these are portrayed as the true monsters of the story. George asserts that they desire to burn Margery not because she is a witch, but because they have been told they are in no danger of the law. The story makes us question whether the monstrous comes from the past or the present.

Faced with inhuman torture, Margery agrees to restore George’s youth. In tears, she apologizes to him for abandoning such a ‘blessed arrangement’ that ‘would have gone so well for all parties’ (57). Then Margery takes George by the hands and transfers youth and health back to him, waning as he waxes stronger. With some of his strength restored, George shakes himself free of Margery, allowing her to retain some of the youth, though she is now aged considerably. Still aged yet with renewed vigor, George is able to force the rabble to leave his home. Of the hostile group, only the determined Palmer and his daughter remain.

Farmer Palmer says that he will still allow the blood-thirsty peasantry to burn Margery unless George relents to marry young Margaret within the month. George suggests they wait two or three more years, ‘with the principle of the family at heart’ (59). He is backed into a corner, trying to reinstitute the original Rosedhu system. Palmer refuses; a month’s time is all that is offered. George, left with no alternative, concedes with a sigh, for he can still hear the blazing pyre: ‘A howl from without—a fresh faggot was cast on the fire. The pyre was not on my ground but on a bit of waste adjoining the lane, and as I am not lord of the manor I have no rights over it. That the rascals knew’ (60). The pyre which compels George to quick marriage is appropriately located on the limen, the threshold of Foggaton, which George has no say over because, despite what people may call him, he does not have the rights of a lord.

_Margery of Quether_ is, in a sense, a fantasy tale for the late-Victorian landowner – or, rather, any late Victorian with anxieties about losing foundational ‘ground’ in the _fin-de-siècle_. Because of an interesting and intimate perspective, the monster of the story
is made into a sympathetic character, and she can be seen, from a certain angle, as the heroine. She is driven away in the end, and the plan fails, but George is able to save her from the fire. It is at least a slight victory for him, like his partial rescue of the decaying church of Brentor.

At the end of his tale, George states that the purpose of his narrative is ‘to let people know that Margery of Quether is about somewhere’. He believes she has retreated back into the space of myths and folklore, ‘into the remotest parts of Dartmoor’ (60). He knows that the number of visitors to Dartmoor is increasing and trusts that, since her story is now known, Margery will be given ‘a wide berth’ (61).

The increase in visitors to Dartmoor could be paralleled with the advance of science, reason, and progress on the realm of the fantastic. George would then be asking that space be given to those things that are not ‘real’ in the rational sense. By telling the story of Margery, George allows a space for her to exist. Folklore and literature can provide liminality, bridging within the reader's half-belief in the story ‘what is’ with ‘what could be.’

In a sense, this story is about death, indicated by the dreadful immortality (or, rather, perpetual mortality) of Margery and the related ancient Rosedhu system which is designed to churn out one identical Rosedhu after another. Furthermore, Margery's new ‘Rosedhu system’ is based on draining the life out of successive husbands, ‘ad infinitum’ (44). Margery's curse alludes to the Greek story of the Cumean Sibyl, who was also granted immortality without eternal youth. Like Margery, the Sibyl aged and withered into a smaller and smaller state, until she was kept hanging in a jar (like Margery hanging from the bell rope?). Here is a haunting account of the myth written around 62-65 A.D by Petronius in his Satyricon:

For once I saw with my own eyes the Cumean Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked taunting the Sibyl: What do you want? she answered: I want to die.\(^9\)

When George first meets Margery, he asks if she is a spirit. She replies, ‘Spirit – spirit!’ she echoed. ‘Lauk a mussy! I wish I was! Spirit! No such luck comed to me yet. If I was I'd be thankful! Ah!’

Despite the often light tone of Margery of Quether, it leads us to think anew on mortality.\(^10\)

George's conservative desire to remain the same thwarts any expansion or advancement of person. His desire (as mirrored in the misguided prayer of Margery) is to maintain the land – that is, the dirt, the material, the mortal – into perpetuity. As

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\(^9\) This quotation serves as the epigraph of T.S. Eliot's poem The Waste Land.

\(^10\) Another Victorian text on perpetual mortality, Tennyson's poem “Tithonus,” was coincidentally published in the Cornhill Magazine in 1860, twenty-four years before Margery (the original form “Tithon” was written in 1833). The poem, drawn from Greek myth, is narrated by Tithonus, who was granted immortality but not eternal youth. He grows forever older and desires death, while his consort Eos, the goddess of dawn, is reborn in youthfulness every morning—an image reminiscent not only of cursed, decrepit Margery, but also of the aged, complaining George beside his “reborn” Margery. An influence on Margery of Quether?
I have said, Baring-Gould often associated such stagnancy with hell, as he associated eternal progress with heaven. Strangely enough, the equally conservative Margery causes George to change through emasculation and an acceptance of the fantastic. While of the past, she is also something uniquely new, because she spans and connects both past and present. Her supernatural state draws him out of his obsession with land, and he is willing to abandon his Rosedhu system and his life for something else.

Baring-Gould's story seems to contend subtly (among other things) that one needs a place for the fantastic, the spiritual, and the infinite; otherwise one is constricted and development is hampered. Without the spiritual, one is trapped, like Margery and George, in mortality. The slack, unresolved nature of liminality can be unsettling (as it is, at first, for George), but it also gives room to move and develop. It is the static condition of tight, defined places that are truly horrifying, as George discovers once all of his ‘Rosedhu systems’ have failed. Though George’s physical life is saved, this rescue leaves him unfulfilled. George Rosedhu is suddenly de-liminalized. To use his prosaic phrase, he is trapped ‘under a dish-cover which [doesn't] quite fit’ (17).

Perhaps Baring-Gould was expressing some of his own struggles ‘on the threshold’ through George in a sort of self-parody. There are many similarities between the author and his character, such as land ownership in Devon and veneration for the past (and of course Baring-Gould drew some inspiration from actual yeomen in the area as well). Baring-Gould is certainly parodying George's desires even while presenting them as sympathetic and even necessary. Writing Gothic fiction allows an author to vent threshold anxieties and to sort a unity out of the seemingly contradictory past and present – at least within the work of fiction. Gothic fiction allows a space for these contradictions, a space for liminality between the real and the fantastic. One of the many pleasures of Margery of Quether is that the character of George, who not only lives in a Gothic story, also very evidently shares the threshold temperament and desires of the Gothic writer (a threshold temperament embodied by the Gothic monster). George asks that we give a ‘wide berth’ to Margery, a space for her (and her kind) in the modern world.

I will close with Baring-Gould's own words on the necessity of liminality, which could be taken as a commentary on the condition of George Rosedhu:

‘But we cannot live wholly in the world of spirit, any more than we ought to live wholly in the world of matter, for our nature is double, and no portion of it should be atrophied. Extreme mysticism is as falsifying of our nature as is extreme worldliness. The stupidity and charlatanism of modern spiritualism is the rebellion of men and women against the materialism of the present conception of life. Where natural expression of a need is checked, it breaks out in a disordered form, just as arrested perspiration and circulation of the blood produce fever.’ (Baring-Gould, Castles and Cave Dwellings of Europe, p. 312)
This paper is a part of a work in progress. I gladly welcome any questions, suggestions, or corrections (kaptainbriton@gmail.com).

**Works Cited**


The Last Years of Sabine Baring-Gould as revealed by his correspondence with others

Ron Wawman

This article draws extensively on three collections of letters written by Sabine. One collection of some 110 letters was sent to his daughter Mary over the 30 years 1893 to 1923.\(^1\) Another collection of 76 letters was sent to Miss Evelyn Healey over the 7 years October 1917 to December 1923.\(^2\) Another, small, collection of 9 letters was written to the Rev I K Anderson between May 1911 and November 1923.\(^3\)

The two larger collections are featured in two existing biographies, one by Bickford Dickinson\(^4\) and one by Harold Kirk-Smith.\(^5\) As new information has become available some of the conclusions made in those biographies need to be reappraised.

How should Sabine’s last years be defined? His own approach in his three volumes of Reminiscences was confirmed in the postscript to a letter he wrote to Evelyn Healey on 19 October 1921, presumably in reply to an enquiry from her. Here he said:

\textit{No Reminiscences have been published. I have written them and had them typed, that is all. I do not expect to publish in my life time. They are in 3 series of 30 years each. The last 30 has not as yet expired.}

For Sabine, then, the last years were his last 30 (or strictly 35) years, ie from 1895 onwards. The 3\textsuperscript{rd} volume of Reminiscences was never published but, by coincidence, Mary’s collection of letters, beginning as it does in 1893 and ending a few months before his death, neatly covers that period.

But going back to the 1890s would involve going back to a time when Sabine was at the height of his powers. Letters written by him to Mary at that time exude a buoyant purposefulness that reflects this. Therefore the 1890s, at least, cannot appropriately be included in his last years.

Looking at Sabine’s letters to Mary it is evident that from shortly before the death of his wife Grace in 1916 there was a significant change in the mood and preoccupations revealed in them. This paper will therefore be particularly concerned with the eight years from 1916 to 1924.

The story begins with two quotations from Bickford Dickinson’s biography:

\(^1\) Sabine Baring-Gould, letters to Mary Dickinson, Held at Devon Record Office, owned by Dickinson E.
\(^2\) Sabine Baring-Gould, letters to Evelyn Healey, Held at Alder, Lewdown, owned by Merriol Almond.
Firstly:

These were sad and lonely years for the old man and far from easy ones for those who cared for him, for towards the end he became querulous and at times unreasonable. Mary was able to come over frequently from her home at Dunsland, and during the hours that she sat alone with him in his room she probably heard a number of complaints, for he had begun to resent, with the feeble anger of old age, the fact that he was no longer the unquestioned autocrat in his own house; but Mary had the gift of silence and never disclosed their conversations.

Secondly

In October [1920] he said he did not intend the third volume of Reminiscences to be published until 15 years after his death. Today not only the whole of the third volume of reminiscences has vanished but a chapter on his marriage with Grace was cut out of the second volume.

The existence of this chapter is confirmed in the final known letter to Mary written on 10 September 1923. In it he wrote:

I send you the chapter on dear Mama, that I have reluctantly been obliged to write for the second series of my Reminiscences. When you have read it please send it on to Vera, and ask her to forward it on to Grace at Leawood. I should also wish to hear your and their strictures upon the chapter.

A slight criticism of Dickinson is that, inclined as he was to demonstrate a special role for his mother, Mary, in Sabine’s life, when referring to this letter he omitted to mention Sabine’s other daughters, Vera and Grace. He also omitted any mention of Sabine’s reluctance to write this chapter despite this being a possible factor in its disappearance.

Dickinson is not alone in this selective use of references and quotation. Biographers inevitably do this to support their own conclusions, almost without realising what they are doing. This has persuaded the author that the whole of the correspondence and all the other related primary source material he has transcribed, researched and annotated in recent years will in due course be published in its entirety so that readers can draw their own conclusions.

What did happen to the missing manuscripts (or any early typed version of the third volume, the existence of which is implied above)?

Bickford Dickinson wrote:

The manuscript [of his Reminiscences] on which he was working at the time of his death seems to have been lost, destroyed or possibly suppressed.

Keith Lister in his biography quoted the following statement by Sabine’s son Edward published in the Evening Echo dated 5 February 1934.

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6 Bickford H. C. Dickinson, Sabine Baring-Gould, p. 173
7 Bickford H. C. Dickinson, Sabine Baring-Gould, p. 172-3
8 Bickford H. C. Dickinson, Sabine Baring-Gould, p. 72
My father instructed me to revise them [the manuscripts] carefully and not hesitate to cut parts out or destroy them altogether if, in my opinion it was desirable, and their publication might cause pain to any one mentioned in the volume. Naturally after his death a diligent search was made for the manuscript but in vain. Inquiry of the maid attending his room revealed the fact that one morning there was a great quantity of ash in the grate as if a large amount of manuscript had been burnt.

So, that is that – or is it? In recent years, when discussing Sabine’s last years, Merriol Almond informed the author that Edward’s daughter, Adele had witnessed her brother, Edward, burning the manuscript. Edward’s explanation at the time was that he thought the contents would be offensive to the church hierarchy.

So Dickinson was right, the material for the third volume (and possibly the missing chapter on Grace) was suppressed.

However, what Bickford did not say was that he also had deliberately destroyed material. Before his death he wrote the following on the envelope containing the collection of Mary’s letters:

*These letters should on no account become public without careful re-reading by a member of the family. I have given away a number to relatives and have destroyed a few very personal ones.*

Fortunately one small collection of five letters, given away to Merriol Almond’s father, also called Sabine, by Dickinson, is now re-united with the rest of the collection at the Devon Record Office. Nevertheless several of the letters quoted by Dickinson in his biography have not survived in this collection and there is no way of knowing how many other letters may have been destroyed or passed by him to others.

Two years ago Elizabeth Dickinson, the present owner of the letters met with Merriol and they agreed to pass them on to the author of this paper with a view to them being transcribed, researched and eventually deposited in the Devon Record Office.

Was that the end of suppression? Not quite. Although the author is unaware of further evidence of deliberate suppression by the Baring-Gould family, there are two more surprises in store.

Harold Kirk-Smith, in his biography, quoted from what he described as a collection of 72 letters from Sabine to Miss Evelyn Healey. He described Miss Healey as a friend of the Baring-Gould family and he worked from transcriptions he convinced himself had been made locally. This description was misleading, however, and resulted in a great deal of confusion when, in 2004, Merriol Almond purchased a collection of letters from a Professor Peter Dickinson. When these were examined on her behalf, they turned out to be a transcription of the very same 76 (not 72) letters to Evelyn Healey but with the added bonus of 36 of the original manuscript letters. It was eventually possible to establish that both collections came from a certain Mrs Olwen Peck, who was a friend of Professor Dickinson’s wife. In 1988, Mrs Peck

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10 Professor Peter Dickinson is not related to Mary Dickinson or her descendants
before her death had passed to Professor Dickinson’s wife the top copy of a typed transcription of 76 letters together with the 36 manuscript letters and some other unrelated material. What Kirk-Smith had access to was merely the carbon copy of the letters that had been purchased directly from Mrs Peck around 1986. Unfortunately no one now alive is now able to say how the letters came to be in the possession of Mrs Peck or what her relationship might have been to Miss Healey.

Kirk-Smith was, as will be seen, in error when he described Miss Healey as a friend of the family.11 As yet nothing more is known about Miss Healey apart from the fact that she sold 4 manuscript copies of Sabine’s hymns at Sotheby’s in 193412 and was still alive in 1956. The letters confirm that Sabine gave the manuscript copies of his hymns to Miss Healey at her request and on different occasions. Miss Healey’s age at the time of the correspondence is not known but from the content of the letters her birthday was probably 12 February.

There were also two other facts of which Kirk-Smith was unaware when writing his biography. It is clear from the manuscript annotations found on the top copy of the transcription that this was made and typed by Evelyn Healey herself. The author soon discovered that her transcription was very accurate and he could have been forgiven if, when he came to deal with the surviving manuscript letters, he had relied on her transcript entirely.

Had he done so he would have failed to discover that Evelyn, in her transcription, had deliberately censored out what she must have concluded were potentially sensitive passages in the letters. No reason for this censorship presents itself apart from the possibility that Evelyn perhaps had her own thoughts of publication. Be that as it may, these censored passages do give some inkling of why members of the Baring-Gould family might have thought it best to prudently draw a veil over aspects of Sabine’s last years.

Finally several of the letters written by Sabine to the Rev I K Anderson, vicar of Mary Tavy, and now held at the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, have also been subject to censorship. Anderson was an old friend of Sabine and collaborator in the exploration of Dartmoor antiquities. Those letters in this collection that cover the period May 1917 to November 1923 have been censored, with many lines heavily crossed out by an unknown hand. Fortunately for this study the erasure was not always thorough and here and there significant phrases can still be transcribed.

Before focussing on Sabine’s last years, a brief overview of Sabine’s letters to Mary will help to put the troubled nature of the later correspondence in context.

The first letter to Mary was written on 17 January 1893 just 6 days after her marriage to Harvey Dickinson. It is an unusually emotional and affectionate letter beginning: My own darling Mary. Similar unusually warm letters were written at the birth of Mary’s first child later that year and again in 1911 when Mary had surgery for what proved to be a benign tumour. Otherwise the letters, while mostly warm and cheerful,

12 Roger Bristow, personal communication. The hymns are now held at Exeter Cathedral library.
and usually beginning *My dear Mary*, are businesslike in that, more often than not, the principle reason for writing was for such purposes as enclosing a quarterly cheque, thanking her for gifts or best wishes, giving, or responding to invitations to visit, or, not infrequently, asking her to do something for him. Thus when Mary was living near Plymouth and later in London he would often ask her to visit agents and find such servants as a cook or a butler or, when there was illness in the house, a nurse. When Mary was living at Bude he would ask her to find lodgings for convalescent members of his household.

Fortunately, more often than not, he then proceeded to use the letters as vehicles for passing on news, be this news of what other members of the family were doing, of his trips to the continent or of visitors to Lew House. Often he gave Mary news of illness whether in himself, in members of the household or in the parish. Sometimes he wrote about what Grace was doing. The correspondence is remarkable for the frequency with which he gave news of various family members. Over the years every family member was mentioned many times. This has, for example, thrown particular light on the meticulous care that Sabine took over the employment placements of his sons Julian, Harry and Willy to enable them to gain practical experience in various aspects of engineering. Thus Julian was placed with a mining firm to prepare himself for the sort of work he was likely to encounter in Sarawak. What is also very clear is that Sabine greatly approved of any of his children when they were being industrious and responsible. He disliked frivolity and indolence. It is this attitude to industry and idleness that has led some observers to suggest that he had favourites. Some of his children, notably Felicitas and Barbara, appear to have moved in and out of their father’s approval for these reasons.

As always more can be found in one piece of primary source material when it is related to another. Thus in a letter to Mary from Dinan in 1901 Sabine wrote about two of his daughters:

*I really think that Barbie and Di are happy here. Di is blooming like a rose in June and the mother at the convent would not believe that she had not painted her cheeks, so conceive how blooming she must be.*

The following passage in the manuscript biographical notes of Sabine’s daughter Joan gives an amusing twist to this account.

*When we were in Dinan .... my sister Diana, used to buy or borrow 6d novels always in red – she used to lick these to rouge her cheeks. My dear father (thoroughly taken in) used to say “At least this move has done Diana good, from being a pale child she has now a beautiful complexion”*

The letters are full of significant family information. The only drawback is that for most of the time the surviving letters are infrequent and do no more than give a hazy snapshot at a particular moment in time. Sometimes, particularly in the 1890s, Sabine wrote a succession of letters covering one subject, such as a distressing influenza.

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outbreak in 1894 or the production of *Red Spider*, the Opera, in 1898. During the 1890s Sabine averaged about one letter a month, while in later years the rate of surviving letters declined to two or three letters a year.

Grace was mentioned in the letters from time to time. Sometimes this was to say she was well or was busy, at others that she was unwell. Occasionally he used such phrases as ‘chirpy’ to describe Grace, at others he wrote that she seemed worried and on one occasion in March 1911, when she and Sabine were on the continent together, and there was a lack of letters from home, he described how Grace had made herself ill with worry because of the lack of news of the pregnancy of their daughter Diana. At other times it is evident that Sabine was alone at home while Grace was away visiting various members of the family.

There are only two letters from Grace to Mary in this collection. Sabine’s remarks in a letter written on 19 April 1895 suggests a possible reason:

*Mamma will add her best wishes in a letter which will cost her time and sighs and efforts incredible, and a brow beaded with perspiration.*

The first of Grace’s letters, written in 1906, included the following revealing passage:

*When can you and Harvey come and stay with us. I am sorry I cannot ask the dear boys, but Papa does not seem able now to bear the noise of children at table, it is different if they are in the nursery, I am sure you will understand my darling, I thought you would be hurt if I asked you and not the boys, now you know the only reason why you have not been asked lately, you may be quite sure there is nothing else, I have wanted to write and tell you ever so long the reason but have kept putting it off, but I could not any longer, please write and tell me you understand I cannot bear that you should feel hurt or slighted in any way.*

It would seem that Grace found herself cast in the difficult role of piggy in the middle with torn loyalties; distressed at not having her grandchildren to stay and having to somehow explain and excuse Sabine’s attitude to Mary. Sabine’s letters told a different story. While always professing his love for his grandsons, which there is no reason to doubt, he used the lack of suitable accommodation because of ongoing work in the house or his own pre-occupation with literary deadlines, as reasons for not including the children in invitations. The author offers his own personal explanation. Being in his late 70s he is well aware of the decreasing tolerance an elderly man, working at home, might have of the noise made by three grandsons aged 6, 10 and 12!

It is of particular interest that during the 1900s and the early 1910s, Grace usually accompanied Sabine on his trips abroad and there are glimpses of Grace’s wonder at a hotel halfway up a cliff in Les Eyzies and her excitement at Paris hats and dresses.

There were three possible reasons for taking Grace, and at times other members of the family, on these excursions. Firstly, now that the children were getting older, it was easier for Grace to get away with her husband. Secondly, as evidenced in a letter written on 1 October 1909, Sabine had become realistically fearful of falling ill when abroad and was reassured by Grace’s presence. Thirdly, in two letters to Mary and
one to a parishioner,\(^\text{14}\) Sabine wrote along the lines that Grace, when she was on the continent, thought nothing of walking 2 or 3 miles, while at home he could not get her to walk as far as the greenhouses. These entries are the only available indications of the increasingly severe arthritis that had afflicted Grace and Sabine’s difficulty getting her to take exercise when at Lew. In December 1913 Sabine travelled to Pau on an unusually brief trip accompanied on that occasion by his friend Gatrill rather than Grace, who it can be assumed was probably too crippled to travel comfortably and was being looked after by daughter Cicely. This was to be Sabine’s last visit to the continent.

Just 7 months later in July 1914 Sabine wrote to Mary asking her if she would visit Miss Biggs, the children’s old governess, who was ill, because ‘I cannot leave Mama so crippled’. It is also evident from a brief if anguished comment in this letter that, not long before, Sabine and Grace had visited Bath so that Grace could take the waters. Sadly the visit was without benefit.

Britain declared war on 5 August 1914 and the next two letters are full of advice and reassurance to Mary about her son Arscott who, along with Sabine’s son John and son-in-law Charles Calmady-Hamlyn was off to the middle east with the Royal North Devon Hussars.

Then on 23 March 1916 he wrote the following:

‘Mamma is worse. We have now to have 2 nurses with her, as she may not be left night or day. She will be tapped for dropsy tomorrow.’

The dropsy, probably fluid retention in the legs, was caused by heart failure, a not uncommon complication of severe and longstanding rheumatoid arthritis. It is clear from the next letter, written just 3 days later on March 26, that while this procedure had caused Grace to lose a lot of fluid it had also weakened her, and the frequent changing of wet sheets had caused her great pain. She died 15 days later on 8 April 1916.

Grace is only mentioned once more in this correspondence when in November 1916 Sabine wrote the following to Mary:

‘I send you, what I think you will value a photo of the miniature of dear Mamma when she was a girl. I hope you get good news of Arscott and Edward.’

It is likely that he sent copies of the photograph to all his children.

The query about Arscott and Edward reflected the anxiety which had entered Sabine’s correspondence during Grace’s last illness and which, in correspondence over the next year or so, seemed to have been transferred to his son John, son-in-law Charles and grandsons Edward and Arscott. Almost immediately a letter expressed concern that Arscott was in hospital with diphtheria. It was to be 5 months before Sabine was able to express his relief that Arscott was out of hospital. Meanwhile Sabine had become desperate for news of his grandson Edward who had been shot in the neck.

Then in January 1917 Sabine expressed relief at news that Charles Calmady-Hamlyn had not been injured, as he had feared. The same letter also informed Mary that her brother, John, was now attached to the Royal Flying Corps.

In March 1917 Sabine wrote that his son, Edward, was home, possibly on embarkation leave before leaving for the Middle East. Evidently Edward was in a despondent mood about the progress of the war. Sabine was deeply affected by Edward’s mood and ended his letter *it quite knocks the heart out of one.*

This sad letter was followed by a hiatus of almost two years before the next surviving letter to Mary. Meanwhile Sabine’s correspondence with Evelyn Healey had begun in October 1917.

It is likely that Miss Healey, who was holidaying in Lydford with her mother, had attended a service in the church at Lew Trenchard with the intention of trying to strike up an acquaintance with Sabine. She must have introduced herself to him after the service. What passed between them is not known but on his return to the church after lunch Sabine was troubled to discover that she was still there.

Her first letter, written soon after the visit, enclosed some of her own verses and the main purpose of Sabine’s reply was to thank her for the verses and compliment her on them. He then went on to apologise to her for not inviting her to lunch after church, as he had assumed she would be returning to Lydford after the service. This apology was repeated in a subsequent letter.

Over the next two months Sabine wrote 5 more letters, all to thank Miss Healey for various items she had sent and also to send, at her request, his own photograph.

It can be concluded that over this period Miss Healey was cultivating an ongoing correspondence. There is evidence, among some other scraps of material included with the letters that came from Olwen Peck, that Evelyn Healey had entered into correspondence with at least one other author, Gerard Young of Bognor Regis, as well as the Rev. Kingdon of Bridgerule, Holsworthy, Devon.

Whatever the reason for this correspondence Sabine would seem to have entered into it quite enthusiastically and had soon told Evelyn about an 8 week bout of bronchitis, invited her to lunch should she come that way again, and described the horrific gunshot wounds his son John had suffered flying over France. At Christmas he responded to her seasonal greetings while in January he thanked her for his birthday greetings. Then, at her request he sent the first manuscript copy of one of his hymns.

There then followed a gap of some 6 months before he wrote thanking her for sending him more of her verses. He also told her that he dreaded the return of winter and being confined to his room and unable to get out. This was to be a recurring theme.

In the next letter, on 19 January 1919 Sabine wrote:

‘Thank you so much for your kind wishes for my birthday. I am not surprised at your love of Dartmoor. I have loved it ever since I was a boy; but alas! I see very little of it now. Last year I did not set my foot upon it. However I trust this year I may get on it and smell the
fragrance of the gorse, once more, as I expect my eldest son back from Palestine and Syria, and then he will have his motor car running.’

The next surviving letter to Mary was also written at this time and included a ‘thank you’ for a bottle of brandy, which Sabine said ‘may come in very useful’. He also told Mary that his daughter, Grace, who had been caring for him had ‘gone to town and Vera is now looking after me.’

The date on which Sabine’s son, Edward came home from the Middle East is uncertain but it is evident from a letter written to Mary on 24 March that Edward had lost no time acquainting himself with the financial affairs of the estate:

‘I enclose quarterly cheque. Edward and I have resolved on selling Orchard, Holdstrong and Warson. Things are looking so threatening for landlords in England, and of investing abroad. Besides repairs on outlying farms are ruinous at present cost of wages.’

An entry in the family bible for the year 1919 included the statement.

‘Change of household. Edward and Marian came to reside in Lew House July 1.’

How did this come about? Sabine’s explanation is to be found in a letter written to Evelyn Healey on 1 January 1920.

‘I suppose you saw when you last came here, that I am passing over the care of the house and house-hold to my eldest son and daughter-in-law. I was no longer able to manage my affairs; and was being robbed by my servants.’

This letter contains the first example of censorship by Miss Healey. The not especially shocking phrase ‘and was being robbed by my servant’s’ had been removed in her transcription.

When this letter was brought to the attention of Merriol Almond she said it was a family tradition that at this time Sabine was drinking in a manner that caused concern. Family members were so fearful that he might fall and injure himself when he had been drinking, that they had dared to water down his bottles of spirits. Presumably Sabine had become aware that something was amiss and had, understandably, assumed that it was the servants who were stealing his drink. Indeed it is said that he also considered the possibility that his suppliers had adulterated the spirits.

It has long been widely accepted that Sabine never recovered from the death of Grace and was neglecting himself. Alcohol misuse is a common feature of a pathological bereavement reaction and it is probable that Sabine was depressed and drinking inappropriately in a vain attempt to achieve sleep and to escape from the loneliness and the mental torment that followed his loss. His distress would have been aggravated by the anxieties thrown up by a family deeply involved in the war. The severity of the bereavement reaction is borne out in the memoirs of his daughter Joan who wrote:

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'Her death nearly broke his heart. He would slip out at night silently and alone to say prayers over her grave. His boyishness left him after her death and never returned.'

At this point it would be useful to try and understand exactly how it was that Marian and Edward came to move into Lew House and to consider the problems this may have created both for themselves and for Sabine.

Edward was, without doubt, the financial wizard of the family. In Sabine’s diary there is a delightful and amusing account, illustrating Edward’s thrift at the Freiburg fair at the age of 10:

1880, 16 Nov:  
‘The fair is in full swing. Whirligigs and shows and stalls, and the children are in wild delight. Last time we were here in 1877, Edward went all round the fair studying what he could buy, and objected to laying out money first in this, then in that, till he found a purse, and he spent half his money on that, in order that he might be able to preserve the rest in it safely. The same dislike to spending money appears now when he is nine. He would not go into the show of Zulus because that was expensive 15 pfennigs, nor witness the achievement of the Industrious Fleas, because entrance was 10 pfennigs; and though all the rest down to Julian spent their money in rides on the whirligigs, Edward would not, dearly as he loves a ride, it would be waste of money. However all at once he saw a little perambulator for a doll. Vera had been for some days clamouring for one. At once his purse opened and he bought it, as a present for her, and alas! In getting out his money for it, dropped and lost 50 pfennigs. He has been very disconsolate since at his loss; and refuses to receive the sum from Mary however much she urges it on him, because she is richest and can best afford it.’

1880, 17 Nov:  
‘Today, Edward’s birthday, Mary has made him accept 50 pf. as a birthday present. His mother has also given him a mark, and I am to treat him and the others this afternoon at the fair to merry-go-rounds and shows.’

1880, 18 Nov:  
‘At the fair again Edward has spent the 50 pf. Mary gave him in purchasing a box of bricks as a present for her.’

8 years later in October 1889 Edward had left Lew to work with a firm of financiers in America. On that day Sabine wrote the following ambivalent comment in his diary:

‘Edward is a very dear boy, everyone loves him, so perfectly gentlemanly in his manner, so upright in mind, and with such a true sense of honour, I doubt not also with deep true love and fear of God in his heart. It is time he should go, as Alex Baring is about to leave the firm of financiers into which Edward goes, and also because he has learned all he can at the school at Tavistock, and is liable to be spoiled by his sisters and others who make a great deal of him. He has no small opinion of himself, and cannot endure contradiction.’

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16 Ronald Wawman, Never Completely Submerged, p. 73
17 Ronald Wawman, Never Completely Submerged, p. 172
Eventually, following his return from the States, Edward had set up a very successful cosmetics business the management of which was disrupted by his service in the army during the war.

No doubt Edward, like so many other men, returned from the war full of hope for the future and determined to pick up life where he had left off. However on his return from the war he discovered that not only was his business in London in some difficulties but, back at Lew, his father was neglecting himself and drinking unwisely, while the financial affairs of the estate were in disarray.

It is likely that other members of the family lost no time entreating Edward, as Sabine’s heir, to ‘do something’ about the situation at Lew now that he was home. Although Edward probably disapproved of the extent of his father’s drinking and was unlikely to understand what lay behind it, he must have felt impelled to do what he could to see that Sabine was properly cared for and the finances of the estate put in order, before urgently turning his attention to London and his business. It is not difficult to imagine him impatiently going through the books with Sabine and firmly recommending certain actions. Firstly, he advised his father to sell off some of the properties on the estate and invest the proceeds abroad. Secondly, he persuaded him to renegotiate the tenancy agreements so that in future tenants would be responsible for their own repairs. Thirdly he told his father to make his will.

Finally, having seen how uncertain Sabine’s care had been, he pressed his father to hand over the management of the house and estate to himself and his wife Marian. It does not seem to have occurred to him that, with his ongoing absence on business in London, the onus would largely fall on Marian. It is evident from letters, the family bible and a will drawn up in 1920 that Sabine agreed to all that Edward wanted to do.

There is no evidence that the tenancy agreements were changed, probably because Edward found this to be impractical. However, as will be seen, Sabine continued to believe that these changes had happened and he therefore paid out for extensive repairs to properties on the estate, in preparation for these changes.

It seems likely that during the war there was an informal arrangement whereby some of Sabine’s daughters, including Vera, young Grace, and, until her marriage in 1916, Cicely, looked after him. The actual management of the house and estate may well have been very loose. It is evident from several entries in his diary and from letters that Sabine had always seen Edward, his eldest son, as special and it was his intention that one day Edward should assume the mantle of squire at Lew. Edward’s actions on his return to Lew might have gone some way towards quelling Sabine’s realistic fears that Edward’s business interests had not previously left much room for Lew Trenchard in his life. Nevertheless although Sabine probably realised that he had no option but to accede to Edward’s demands he undoubtedly resented having to do so.

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19 Ronald Wawman, Never Completely Submerged, p. 218.
It is evident that he was far from content with the loss of his independence or with what he saw as the financial burdens placed upon him.

On 18 July 1921 he wrote to the Rev Anderson:

‘I am stone broke. Ever since the war ended I have had to put all my farms and cottages in repair, for fresh leases so that henceforth the tenants will be responsible. This is all very well for my successors, but it is inimical [?] to me. My son will come into the property without having to pay for repairs – all that has fallen and is falling on me, and I get no advantage from it…… I am simply now a paying guest in my own house.’

It is important to emphasise that despite Edwards’s impatience and Sabine’s resentment over this profound change in the management of the house and estate, prior to this time there is nothing in Sabine’s letters or diary to suggest anything other than a cordial relationship with either Marian or Edward.

What was Marian’s attitude to these changes? She is someone about whom little information is available to the author. She married Edward in 1896, and first came to Lew in 1897 where her welcome, although on a grand scale, also had regard for her possible sensitivities, with Sabine going out of his way to ensure that his daughter, Mary, who was of her own generation, would be on hand to help her feel at home.

Some years later when Edward had returned to England on a permanent basis, he and Marian settled at Lew Trenchard Rectory and it was at the Rectory that Marian spent the war years with their three children, whose ages in 1914 would have been 8, 9 and 12 years. Neither Marian, nor her children, feature in Sabine’s letters to Mary during the war years. It is not known how Marian coped at that time or what support she had from parishioners or other members of the Baring-Gould family.

Although Merriol Almond never knew her grandmother, the impression she has of her is someone who was ‘timid and gentle’. It could be that living in an alien land, far from her own family and separated from her husband at a time of war, she struggled to cope. Who knows, perhaps she dreamed of a new life after the war, possible living with Edward in London. There is reason to believe that her health was fragile and indeed she died in 1931 at the relatively young age of 60. All in all it is not difficult to conclude that she would have viewed the prospect of single-handedly taking on responsibility for Lew House and its elderly occupant with fear and dismay.

For a time Sabine’s correspondence with both Mary and Evelyn Healey continued as previously although letters to Mary were less frequent, contained much less family news and were more often in the nature of enclosing quarterly payments, giving and exchanging greetings or thanking Mary for gifts – sometimes game birds, such as snipe and woodcock, but more often garments knitted by Mary. Letters to Evelyn remained on an unchanged footing with responses to seasonal greetings, expressions of gratitude for items she sent to him, exchanges of birthday greetings and news of his own frequent episodes of bronchitis and loss of voice. A recurring theme of his letters to Evelyn during the autumn and winter months was his longing for the spring.

20 The last phrase of this letter had been crossed out but was nevertheless just legible
21 Sabine Baring-Gould, Letter to daughter Mary, 17 January 1897
During the spring and summer he wrote several times of his dread of the return of winter and being ill and confined to his room.

From time to time Evelyn wrote to tell Sabine that she was planning to visit Devon. Each time he invited her to come for lunch. Each time she visited briefly and each time in subsequent letters Sabine lamented the brevity of their meeting. The first visit coincided with the time that Marian and Edward were taking over management of the house. It is possible that Marian or Edward saw her then and wondered who she was and what was her purpose there. Her second visit was in June 1920, a year later.

The first inkling that all might not have been well at Lew House is to be found, not in the letters but in the entries in the family bible for 1920 and 1921. The first simply stated that Sabine had given two religious paintings away— one to Tavistock Church, the other to Buckfast Abbey. The second told of two more paintings being given to Lewtrenchard Church, but this time with the comment

*Marian wants to turn all religious pictures out of the house.*

This reference to Marian wanting the religious paintings turned out of the house is repeated in an inadequately censored comment in a letter to the Rev. Anderson on 18 July 1921.

Two related questions come to mind. Why would Marian want to turn all the religious paintings out of the house? Why would Sabine go along with this?— the paintings in question were works of art he had commissioned and were much admired by him. One possibility could be that Marian simply had her own ideas of décor and could not wait to implement them. But why would Sabine agree to that? Another could be that Edward had told Sabine that Marian found the house oppressive and spooky and maybe these paintings made her particularly uneasy. Sabine would then perhaps have agreed to dispose of the paintings out of sympathy for Marian.

Merriol Almond has provided a puzzling piece of information. At some point Marian came to regard Sabine as a menacing figure and for this reason had placed a crucifix in Merriol’s father’s bedroom to protect him from any threat. No simple explanation suggests itself for this behaviour and in the absence of further information it is only possible to suggest that it reflected the unhappy and troubled state of Marian’s mind.

In a letter written from Lew House to Evelyn Healey on 11 October 1922, Sabine wrote:

*I have been in Exeter. I went there to be out of the way of a “ruction” here. But that is over now.*

This possible indication of tensions between Marian and Edward is echoed in a partially crossed out passage in a letter written to the Rev Anderson on 18 July 1923:

*I am not at all happy, the cool family atmosphere is not at all to my liking.*

On Christmas Eve 1921 came the only less than equable letter to Mary in the whole of Sabine’s surviving correspondence with her. It somehow escaped Bickford

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22 Ronald Wawman, *Never Completely Submerged*, p. 218
Dickinson’s censorship. It started amicably enough but eventually Sabine’s irritation burst through

Very many thanks for the wood-cock and snipe, the latter I had for my lunch yesterday, and uncommonly good it was. I have a distaste for butcher’s meat, so these birds came in very gratefully.

So you have Edward and his wife with you, I wish they would come over and see us, but B.G. says this is impossible as they have not the time.

I wish you all a happy New Year, it is too late to wish you a glad Christmas, as you will not get this letter till Tuesday. I enclose the quarterly cheque

This is Sabine’s only reference to Marian as Edward’s wife rather than by her name, in his surviving correspondence with Mary and the only reference to Edward as B.G. ie – the BG, or head of the household. In one angry letter to Evelyn, Sabine described Marian as Mrs. E, although usually she was referred to as my daughter in law, or, when he was particularly angry, my American daughter in law

Whether other members of the family were at Lew House for Christmas is not clear but at first sight it does seem strange that Edward, Sabine and, indeed, Mary, had not agreed some amicable arrangements for Christmas. However from a comment in a letter to Evelyn Healey on 13 December an innocent explanation is possible. In that letter Sabine told Miss Healey that he would be spending Christmas with his aunt, Kate Bond, at 4, Colleton Crescent in Exeter. He probably also told both Mary and Edward of his intentions but when, for some reason, he changed his plans this either did not get through to them, or, if it did, they were not prepared to vary their plans to accommodate Sabine’s wishes. Either way this episode did not bode well.

Sabine was clearly determined that he would not be abandoned at Christmas again and he did spend the following Christmas, 1922, with Aunt Kate. He probably wrote to all and sundry telling them what a splendid time he had.23 24 25

In the Christmas 1921 letter Sabine hinted at the impatience of Edward and Marian who had not the time to see him. This impatience is also apparent in two other letters.

On 28 January 1922 in a letter to Mr Quick, one time librarian at the Tavistock Subscription library, thanking him for birthday greetings, Sabine wrote:

I must thank you most cordially for your kind good wishes on my birthday. I am glad to hear that your mother is keeping well. I get into Tavistock now very rarely and when I do it is in my son’s motor. And he and his wife are always in a hurry to get home so that there is no chance of getting out to see you.26

In a letter written to the Rev. Anderson on 7 April 1923 Sabine wrote:

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25 Letter to Hilda Piper (a parishioner) dated 22 December 1922, Held at Devon Record Office, Box 5203. Owned by Merriol Almond.
I am so distressed to hear of your illness. Yesterday as my son had to return to town he motored early to Okehampton and allowed me to go with him and to return by Blackdown. I stopped the car at the inn and went down to the Rectory, and had a great shock at seeing the blinds down. I returned up the hill to the car and learned from the taverner that you were ill and in the village. I would have gone down to see you, but that my da-in-law was in the car and was impatient to get on..... I cannot use my son’s car. It is never offered to one, and I only have my old cob and a low four-wheeler for going about parishing, but it would not do for a long drive to Mary Tavy. I wish it were.

Another letter to the Rev Anderson written some 3 months later on 18 July 1923 gives some indication of the level of physical incapacity being endured by Sabine at this time:

I wish I could get over to see you. But if I took train to M.T. station I could not walk so far as the church and its neighbouring cottage. My walking powers are reduced to hobbling round the garden with a stick.

How I look back upon and think ever of the happy days that we spent together in Wales and on Whittor? I have not set foot on Dartmoor now for 5 years and I doubt if I shall again. Ah! the days of old! But one looks forward to what will be. I do so most earnestly....

In a sad letter written on 16 February 1923 to Mr Head, who illustrated some of Sabine’s books, Sabine summed up his distress and unhappiness at this time.

Dear Mr Head

Thank you so much for your letter. It was my 89th birthday on Jan 28th, and my entry into my 90th year. I spent the day in bed to which I have been confined for 3 weeks. I am only now emancipated from it, and I got out yesterday and the day before for a short time. I have given up my house and household to my eldest son and his American wife, or rather they have been taken from me, as they supposed me too old and infirm to be able to manage for myself. The change is not altogether to my liking, but I have to submit to it. American ways of thought and habits are so foreign and distasteful to me.

I should dearly like to see you here, but I dare not ask leave for any friends to come to me, as all sorts of objections would be raised.

I do not suppose that my time here can be much prolonged, and I shall not be sorry to go to my great Master and Lord and meet again the dear ones I have lost.

Sabine’s frustrations over the effect his physical health had on his ability to travel more widely had been well described in a letter to Evelyn Healey as early as 19 August 1921:

I made a dash last week to Winchester, to see the Cathedral and to hear the choir. But, alas! the latter had been given three weeks holiday. Then I fell ill with an attack that comes on me occasionally and unexpectedly, and had to dash home. I got as far as Exeter and remained there resting for two days. There I found the boy choristers were laid up with mumps, so there was only very inadequate singing by 5 men, and one of these had a cracked squawking

27 M.T. : Mary Tavy
28 Whittor, Dartmoor: Also known as White Tor, Whit Tor or Peter Tor. See Sabine’s The Book of Dartmoor, pp 97-102. Whit Tor planned by Anderson.
29 David Shacklock, SBGAS Newsletter, No.10, Oct 1992, p. 2
voice. I reached home on Friday a wiser man than when I left. I had learned that I am too old and tottery to be frisking about the country, at all events alone.

Also in 1921, Sabine’s relationship with Evelyn Healey, had taken an unexpected turn. In February Sabine had moved from addressing her as Dear Miss Healey to My dear Miss Healey. Then in October 1921, following another brief visit by her to Lew, Sabine wrote saying how pleased he was that she had decided henceforth to write a monthly letter. On 21 November, further emboldened, he told he would no longer call her Miss Healey and thereafter addressed her as My dear Evelyn.

Then in March 1922, at a time when Evelyn was unwell, he wrote the first of a series of letters in which not only did he express his distress at her illness but repeatedly emphasised the importance of their relationship to him.

On 27 April 1922 he wrote the following:

I was so glad to hear from you this morning as I had been worrying greatly about you and was in doubt whether to write to you at Southsea or at the Convalescent Home. There is however one thing in your letter I do not relish, your telling me that you will not be writing to me a monthly letter any more. When one gets old and one’s course on Earth is drawing to a close, the few friends that remain of like mind become more and more precious to one.

I leave for Exeter on May 1. My da-in-law is shutting up Lew House and giving holiday for 3 weeks or a month to the servants, so I have been told to shift for myself. I have to go but am only just recovering from a bronchitis attack and have lost my voice. My address in Exeter will be the R. Clarence Hotel, The Close

2 weeks later on 6 May he wrote from the Royal Clarence Hotel:

I was so glad to hear from you, and to hear that you were on the mend and in pleasant quarters recruiting I really was in trouble about you, I am quite convinced there is reciprocity in souls, where there is friendship, and that week when you had your operation, I felt so especially in trouble and care about you.

I am in Exeter for three weeks, because the house is being turned up-side down and the servants are given their holiday. So I have to bear being away from my home. There are many friends and acquaintances here who are very kind calling on me, but I am not well enough to accept their kind invitations.

On 26 May he wrote in a letter beginning

My very dear Evelyn:

I have felt that there is a community of souls, and that where there is a bond of love, when one member suffers the other is sensible and feels with it.

I have been unwell all this last three weeks. Really I ought not to have been turned out of my house when only just recovering from bronchitis. But I am better today, and was so yesterday when the warm weather returned. I go home next Wednesday, and shall never again I trust quit Lew till the Day of Judgement.

Aside from the emotional bond that was clearly developing between Sabine and Evelyn this letter gave a worrying glimpse of problems at Lew. Why was Sabine turned out of his home when he was patently ill? Why did he not refuse to budge?
It can be concluded that Marian simply did not know how to handle Sabine. Was she perhaps obsessionally house proud? Was the spring-cleaning at Lew what she was accustomed to doing at previous dwellings? Perhaps she was barely able to conquer her fears of her father in law and, having eventually done so, could not contemplate any change to her plans. Perhaps Sabine was only too well aware of her vulnerability and, apart from grumbling, was reluctant to cause further distress by refusing to move.

Sadly this same performance was to be repeated in the year 1923. On this occasion however Sabine had already persuaded Evelyn Healey, who was planning another visit to Devon, to stay at Lewdown, rather than Staverton as she originally intended, and take lodging at the Blue Lion inn. However, Marian decided to carry out her annual spring clean of Lew House over the same dates. Sabine’s eventual response was the following explosion of fury written on 31 May 1923 – part of which, shown in bold, was edited out of Evelyn Healey’s transcription:

*I shall be away in Exeter till June 18th, but I have told my groom that he and my little carriage are to be entirely at the disposal of your mother and yourself till my return. It is no pleasure of mine that takes me away.*

*I am turned out of my own house by my American daughter-in-law, who is giving the servants their holiday en bloc, with the exception of two who could have managed for one quite well. But it was not to be. King Lear went through somewhat similar circumstances.*

*I am turned out of my own house by my American daughter-in-law, who is giving the servants their holiday en bloc, with the exception of two who could have managed for one quite well. But it was not to be. King Lear went through somewhat similar circumstances.*

Charlie Dustan my groom will advise you where to visit and make excursions. I really do think that you will have fine weather. Summer seems at last to have set in.

As it happened Evelyn was able to adjust her dates sufficiently so that, at the end of her holiday, she could enjoy a trip to Exeter with Sabine for lunch at the Royal Clarence followed by a choral service at the cathedral. It is of interest to note, knowing how tongues are inclined to wag at Lew, that he and Evelyn were prudently accompanied by a young parishioner, Edith Martin, who was about to enter on a nursing career. She lived to be over 100 and only died some 10 years ago.

To celebrate Evelyn’s birthday on 12 February 1923, Sabine arranged with his publishers for a copy of his novel *The Queen of Love* to be sent to her.

It is tempting to speculate on what might have persuaded Sabine to choose this particular novel as a birthday present rather than any other book? The novel does have many *droll situations*, as he wrote in a letter, but the overall impression is of tragic situations, intriguing studies of particular relationships and the stark portrayal of personalities – some of which are decidedly unpleasant. The relationship between Jabez Grice and his son, Andrew, summed up in the final chapter, chimes with Sabine’s conclusions on his relationship with his own father. There is also an amusing vignette in which an older man, Poles, makes a fool of himself with a younger girl but it seems unlikely that Sabine would have wanted to draw attention to that! It is perhaps more profitable to look at Sabine’s situation at Lew House at the time the letter was written and to see that there are parallels between the humiliating

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There was to be one more explosion of rage, edited out of Evelyn’s manuscript, written on 14 November 1923, at a time when Sabine’s health was declining:

*I am in no very flourishing condition myself, and am in sad vexation, my American daughter in law has upset all the rooms on the ground floor and turned them about as for a jumble-sale. I hate to go into them now.*

This may be an example of obsessional behaviour by Marian but the outburst could also have reflected a level of mental confusion in Sabine arising from an acute deterioration in his physical health. Four months earlier, in July 1923, Sabine had suffered what was probably a severe illness the details of which are not known. Over the years it is evident that, usually, when he was ill and confined to bed Sabine continued to write letters. During this illness, which left him physically much weaker, Sabine apparently wrote no letters to Evelyn. Thereafter, however, the rate of letter writing to Evelyn Healey increased to the extent that they give an unusually full picture of Sabine’s physical decline over the following months. In these letters he repeatedly harked back to their last meeting in Exeter. As usual he dreaded the onset of winter and the confinement this would entail but he also clung to the hope that he might see her again in the spring.

Evelyn had been learning to type and, on 1 September, Sabine commented favourably on a letter typed by her. Then on 27 September he asked if she could recommend a professional typist to help him with a religious book on which he was working.\(^{31}\) Evelyn volunteered herself for this task. At first he refused to accept her offer before eventually agreeing on condition she allowed him to pay her the going rate.

Over the next few weeks he sent her chapters, one of which was on Paulinism, got in a muddle over what he had sent and wrote apologetically of confusion and poor memory. He was pleased with her first efforts but it did not get much further than that. On 1 November he wrote that he was greatly alarmed to hear that she was ill with pleurisy. Letters over the following few weeks include reports of his own confusion and forgetfulness and expressions of concern for her health coupled with the information that he was praying for her daily.

On 26 November he wrote:

\(^{31}\) There is no publication in the bibliography relating to the book on which Sabine was working with Evelyn’s help during the last few months of his life. It was probably never completed and was not published after his death. In box 13 of the Baring-Gould deposit box 5203 are the following typescript chapters of an unpublished book *The Growth of Religious Convictions*:

- chapter 2: Miracles;
- chapter 3: Paulinism (3 copies);
- chapter 4: Paulinism & Calvinism;
- chapter 5: Paulinism & Lutheranism;
- chapter 6: The atonement;
- chapter 7: Eschatology;
- chapter 8: Papalism;
- chapter 9: Modernism;
- chapter 10: Present and Future.

Unfortunately chapter 1 is missing but the presence of a chapter on Paulinism, mentioned in a letter written on 12 October 1923, suggests that this was the book on which he was working in 1923.
'I do hope that you are on the mend. Please to return to me the chapter or chapters I sent to you to be retyped. I am very ill and feel as though I were failing altogether. I can not recall any thing about the M.S. scrap to which you allude, but for the last fortnight I have been so incapable of remembering anything.'

On the 22 November he had written to the Rev. Anderson’s wife:

‘I do so heartily condole with you on the loss of your husband. I have not seen him for many years, during the war I had only my cob and dog-cart, and the cob was unequal to the Journey. [the next 3 lines are crossed out – but they appear to read: ‘Since then my eldest son & his American wife have taken charge of me and the household. ---------] Now I am very infirm and at present for 3 weeks confined to bed.

How often do I think of Mr. Anderson and of the happy days we have spent together on the Moor and in Wales. What a value he has been to me when I wanted advice or some me — [?] bit of information. It can not now be long before we meet in Our Father’s home. I am rapidly breaking up.

With the tenderest sympathy’

Then on 30 November he wrote on a postcard to Evelyn Healey:

‘Thanks for returned chapters. Am breaking up. Confined to my bed. Best wishes for your recovery.’

On 13 December, on another postcard, came the final message to Evelyn:

‘Many thanks for the Calendar, will be most useful. Still very ill and confined to bed.’

Sabine died just 20 days later on 2 January 1924.

Although, on 1 September 1922, Sabine had told Evelyn he was busy making changes to Early Reminiscences at the request of his publishers and on 21 March 1923 had written that he was busy correcting the proof of that volume of his Reminiscences, at no point in their correspondence did he tell her that he was actively working on the second or the missing third volume of his memoirs. It is theoretically possible that, after writing his last letter to Evelyn and realising, as he probably did, that he was close to death, Sabine had started to update his typed version of the third volume and was working on this when he died as suggested by Dickinson, but taking into account his difficulties with the religious book for which Evelyn’s services had been engaged, it is unlikely that he would have achieved very much.

What should be read into Sabine’s relationship with Evelyn Healey?

It would be easy to dismiss this as a foolish dalliance with a younger woman, but, whatever her motives may have been, Evelyn reached out to him intellectually and emotionally in a way that others, busy with their own lives, did not. The series of letters in which he wrote earnestly of a community of spirit between them said it all.

What the relationship meant to Evelyn Healey will probably never be known.

There is no reason to disagree with Bickford Dickinson’s conclusion that Sabine was sad and lonely – desperately lonely, as Marian probably was also. But Sabine was
not, as Dickinson concluded, by nature a solitary man.\textsuperscript{32} Undoubtedly he was self-confident enough to value and use solitude in his work, but he needed and regularly sought close social contact throughout his life. This presumably is the main reason why, despite giving up preaching because of his frequent and prolonged loss of voice, he continued to go parishing and visit his parishioners until two months before his death. Contrary to what is implied by Dickinson, the contents of the many letters written to Miss Healey in his last year do not indicate any loss of mental alertness, significant memory impairment or loss of emotional control until 1 November 1923. Mental confusion and impaired memory then became apparent for the first time as part of his final physical deterioration. There is nothing in the letters to suggest a dementing process. If Sabine appeared at times to be unreasonable, there were others in the household also capable of unreasonableness in the face of which Sabine grumbled but would seem to have demonstrated remarkable forbearance.

The author is left feeling a great sadness for Sabine, for Marian and also for Edward whose pre-occupations, impatience and absence from Lew much of the time probably contributed to the unhappy situation there. It seems likely that during the last three years or so, relationships in the house were tense with Edward and Sabine on distant terms. Perhaps this explains Edward’s claim\textsuperscript{33} that he was ignored by his father, despite the fact that all the evidence suggests that in happier times Edward occupied a special place in Sabine’s affections. Edward’s claim is suggestive of a defensive need to justify a distant and impatient attitude towards his elderly, unhappy and physically incapacitated father. It is not surprising that after Marian’s death in 1931 Edward seemed not to want to be reminded of anything to do with Sabine or Lew.

In a letter written to Mary on 5 November 1893 Sabine had written:

‘When I take a resolve to do a thing I do it.’

Similarly, in her unpublished memoirs written in 1956, his daughter, Joan Priestley,\textsuperscript{34} wrote:

‘What ever he set out to do, he did. No one could distract him from his purpose..................He was sensitive. Easily hurt.’

On 1 April 1881, during the course of a stressful legal dispute, he wrote in his diary:\textsuperscript{35}

‘I am very much like a buoy. Every wave goes over me and yet I am never completely submerged. The condition is not a happy one but there are others that are worse.’

During the last eight years of Sabine’s life, following the death of Grace, there were often times when he was unable to do what he resolved to do and times when, if not completely submerged, he must have felt close to it. The condition was a deeply unhappy one.


\textsuperscript{33} Personal communication, Merriol Almond.

\textsuperscript{34} Joan Priestley, Notebook Memoirs. Held at the Devon Record Office. Owned by E. Dickinson.

\textsuperscript{35} Ronald Wawman, \textit{Never Completely Submerged}, p. 103
Pixies, Padfoots and Popular Antiquities
Sabine Baring-Gould and Folklore

Introduction:
It is practically impossible to open one of Sabine Baring-Gould’s novels or one of his travelogues without finding examples of folklore: of songs, or of stories. They are essential elements in his story telling. Baring-Gould’s interest in folklore and popular beliefs was lifelong and sat surprisingly comfortably with his own religious beliefs. I have been trying for some time to understand his personal development in this area. This is still ‘work in progress’ but today I am planning to share with you what I have found so far and the conclusions that I have drawn. I am going to talk about the influences that, I believe, kindled his interest in popular antiquity. I am going to give you some examples of his treatment of folklore in his books and in relation to the songs he collected.

As I have said on other topics in previous years, this has not been an easy task. There is not a problem with a shortage of material to work from. The problem lies in the different way in which he treats the same topic at different times. There is also the question of authenticity. There is no question that, on occasion, he has embroidered the story or, over a period of decades, forgotten details. As with his later studies of folk song, he was working in a field that was only just developing its ways of working and he does not always adhere to what modern folklorists would consider best practice. In fact many modern folklorists I have talked to seem to have a pretty low opinion of Baring-Gould’s work. I am not setting out to change their views but I would like to share my own thoughts with you and leave you to make up your own minds.

What is ‘Folklore’?
Let’s take a step back for a minute and have a brief look at what folklore actually is. The Folklore Society, which was founded in 1878, describes itself as an organization devoted to the study of traditional culture. Its website goes on to tell us that the term ‘folklore’ describes the overarching concept that holds together a number of aspects of vernacular culture and cultural traditions, and is also the name of the discipline which studies them. The Concise Oxford dictionary proclaims that folklore is ‘the traditional beliefs and stories of a people, the study of these.’ And it is that focus on ‘beliefs and stories’ that I think lies at the heart of what interested Baring-Gould.

The term ‘popular antiquities’ describes the broader field that includes physical remains and it has a long history. While he walked round Britain looking at the physical antiquities for his book Britannia which was published in 1586 William

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1 http://www.folklore-society.com/aboutus/index.asp, last accessed 26 Jan 2010
Campden took the opportunity to collect anecdotes from local people about their beliefs. The first person to use the word ‘folklore’ was the antiquarian WJ Thoms, writing in 1846. He invited readers to ‘record the manners, customs, observations, superstitions, ballads and proverbs of olden time’. This field had, until then, been known as popular antiquities or popular literature and he, as an aside, suggested that, since this was largely an oral tradition, the Saxon compound word ‘folk-lore’ described it better. Without its hyphen the word has remained in use ever since. With the inception of the Folklore Society there came the development of scientific approaches and it became a very popular and well respected discipline. Baring-Gould, incidentally, did not join the Society.

So we have a field of study that includes the beliefs, superstitions, stories, sayings and songs of groups of ordinary people as well as customs, rites, and rituals. The list could go on and it is interesting that the editors of the recently published *A Dictionary of Folklore* suggest that folklore should be considered as something that is voluntarily and informally communicated, created or done by members of a group of any size and through any medium. It is the group that decides the rules - not ‘officialdom’ in any form. It is also believed, nowadays, that while some traditions may be genuinely antique it is quite possible for a tradition to be relatively young. Doc Rowe, in a number of oral presentations, has given examples where participants regard their activity as traditional when, in fact, the ‘tradition’ is a handful of years old.

The important point to make here is that, no matter what you call it, this is a very wide field of study containing some very small fragments. Presenting the material can be difficult and, almost inevitably, the result will be a patchwork quilt made from those fragments. The target should be to create a coherent and satisfying pattern from those fragments. Skilful writers may use the fragments and build them into narrative which grips and excites - the work of Graves and Crossley-Holland comes to mind and here you edge into the world of the story-teller.

Another focus is given by geography. People are placed in their landscape and, even in an increasingly homogenous nation, local culture and belief remain. Each region of the British Isles, each county of England, each district within those counties still has its residual folklore - albeit some have more than others. Baring-Gould, as we will hear shortly, recognized the value of the lore of West Devon and Dartmoor and took steps from an early age to record it and to keep it alive.

**Early Influences**

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4 Ibid.

5 For example, at the Baring-Gould Study Day, Okehampton, 29th October 2002.
Now I would like to talk for a few minutes about some of the things that I believe influenced Baring-Gould and led him towards his interest in folklore in later life. Very soon after Sabine was born in 1834 his father and mother leased a house in Bratton Clovelly. If you walk eastwards out of the village you will cross a little stream, at which point a large house called ‘Eversfield’ can be seen on a rise to your left. The family engaged a young, local woman, Ann Bickle, to act as nurse to Sabine. We know that she was married with a baby of her own so we can assume that she was, in fact, a wet nurse. Sabine’s mother, in common with many middle class women of her time had no wish to divert her energy into child-raising or to risk physical change by nursing a child. Like many young women of her time the opportunity to be fed well and to be paid a reasonable wage so that she could feed the son and heir of a well-to-do family was some compensation to Ann for leaving her own child in the care of her husband and family.

In due course, Ann left the Baring-Goulds to return to her child and husband in Thrushelton, where he was a farm labourer. Sabine recalled visiting her there with his brother and sister when he was seven years old in one of the brief periods when the family returned to Devon. He describes the pleasure he took in drinking milk from her special mug, in the bottom of which a china frog was revealed as the milk was drained. I am sure that it was during these visits that she delighted the children with her stories and songs.

I believe that Ann Bickle was an important influence on Baring-Gould’s future development. I believe this not just because this was a time when young, middle class children spent much more time with their nurse than with their mothers nor even because he credited her with having saved his life when a bridge across the little stream below the house collapsed. I am interested in the fact that she sang to him and in what she sang. When he was collecting folk songs in middle age he received a number of songs sent in by ladies and gentlemen who recalled the nursery rhymes and children’s songs that their nurses had sung to them. Baring-Gould was stimulated to reconstruct three of the songs that Ann Bickle had sung to him from memory. Two were unexceptional lullabies, such as:

Sleep baby sleep, dad is not nigh
   tossed on the deep, Lul-lu-a-by

The third, though, was ‘My Ladye’s Coach’, re-telling the legend of Lady Howard of Tavistock who rides nightly to Okehampton Castle in a coach made from the bones of her four husbands.

My ladye hath a sable coach
And horses two and four
My ladye hath a black blood hound
That runneth on before
My ladye's coach hath nodding plumes
The driver hath no head
My ladye is an ashen white
As one that long was dead
A strange song to be singing to a young child and you might say – ‘That explains a lot!’

In fact, Sabine exonerated his Nurse from blame when he had a close encounter on that first visit to France at the age of three.

‘It was whilst on the journey to Montpellier over the stony plain, with a hot sun smiting down on me, seated on the box beside my father, whilst the postillion rode one of the two horses, that I experienced a curious sensation. I saw, or fancied that I saw, a crowd of little imps or dwarfs surrounding the carriage, running by the side of the horses, and some leaping on to their backs. One was astride behind the post-boy. They were dressed in brown, with knee breeches, and wore little scarlet caps of liberty. I remarked to my father on what I saw, and he at once removed me into the shade, within the carriage. I still saw the little creatures for a while, but gradually they became fewer and finally disappeared altogether. The vision was due to the sun on my head, but why the sun should conjure up such a vision is to me inexplicable. I cannot recall that my nurse at Bratton had ever spoken to me of, and described, the Pixies.’

And yet William Henderson included in his *Folklore of the Northern Counties* a note from Baring-Gould describing a curious oil-painting then hanging at the family home in Devon representing the merrymaking of pixies or elves.

‘In the background is an elfin city, illumined by the moon. Before the gates is a ring of tiny beings dancing merrily around what is probably a corpse-candle ... In the foreground is water, on which floats a pumpkin with a quarter cut out of it, so as to turn it into a boat with a hood. In this the pixy king and his consort are enthroned, while round the sides of the boat sit the court, dressed in the costume of the period of William of Orange, which is the probable date of the painting’

The description goes on to describe the myriad other beings that populate the painting. I cannot help but wonder where this picture was when Sabine was small. It is no longer in the family collection.

Writing in 1922 Baring-Gould said:

‘There was an incredible amount of superstition among the people in the days when I was a child, and I heard such stories of ghosts, spectral flames, pixies and goblins, that it took me a good many years to clear my head of them. It is really wonderful how that all this superstition has been dissipated in recent years. I am not, however, quite sure that it is wholly gone; only not mentioned’.

I am not sure that he ever did really clear his head. When you read Baring-Gould’s biographies it is evident that he had an early disposition to the study of popular culture in all its forms. He had discovered the Norse tales at school in Mannheim and his interest in popular antiquity developed when he was a teenager and led him first

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8 Sabine Baring-Gould, *Early Reminiscences*, p. 142
to archaeology. We know from his reminiscences that he often took refuge in books - either the English Library at Pau or, when in Lew, his grandfather’s library which gave him a taste for good French and German literature as well as the classics. He admits, though, that his greatest enjoyment was gained from the heroic romances that he found in the library. He filled his head with tales of knight errantry, ghost stories, romances, love adventures and tales of all sorts. This was to provide him with a basis for his style, a stock of plots and the love of a good story that would make him one of England’s most popular authors in later years.

His first job after leaving University was as a school teacher at Hurstpierpoint. He began to read the Icelandic Saga of Grettir the Strong. The book was in Icelandic, of course, and he didn’t speak the language so he managed to find a German-Icelandic dictionary and, in his spare time, worked on translating the saga into English. Baring-Gould was not a sportsman and was given the task of taking boys who were not playing games on walks. To entertain them he would tell stories and when he had run out of his initial stock he turned to Grettir, to the extent that he would be translating during the week the episode that he would tell at the weekend. Grettir proved a hit with the boys and, the more he worked on the story, the more Baring-Gould became fascinated by Iceland and its folklore.

This interest led to his 1862 visit to Iceland and the subsequent publication of his book Iceland, Its Scenes and Sagas in 1863. This is his first great voyage into folklore – consummating his love affair with the mythology of Northern Europe. It is an extraordinary book, combining fact, myth and fiction. It is a travelogue, describing the places and the wildlife but also has a lot to tell us about the people and their beliefs. A large part of the book, though, is taken up by extracts from the Icelandic sagas.

Grettir features strongly in Iceland, Its Scenes and Sagas and was to get his own, eponymous book Grettir the Outlaw in 1890. Grettir struggles manfully, if rather bad-temperedly against other men, against nature and against the supernatural until finally, he is killed in his retreat on the island of Drangey. The rational Baring-Gould explains that this was not due to witchcraft as the saga suggests but to a lack of Vitamin C in his diet! He recalls that the saga affirms that Grettir’s head was carried to the mainland and taken to his mother at her home in Bjarg. Being a strong woman she calmly accepted it and buried it in the home field. Baring-Gould describes how he visited Bjarg and attempted some archaeology:

‘I obtained leave to dig there, and I examined the spot, but found only a great stone under the turf, and this we had not the appliances to move. And perhaps it was as well; for if Grettir’s head be there, it were better that it should rest undisturbed’

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9 Sabine Baring-Gould, Early Reminiscences, p. 252
Visitors can still see the mound in the home field where Grettir’s head lies and, on the glacier-scarred hill overlooking the farm, there is a fine memorial - not to Grettir but to Asdis, his remarkable mother.

Baring-Gould’s next major work on folklore was *The Book of Werewolves* 12 in 1865. This is now one of his best-known books, because of the interest in its subject material and because it has been reprinted over the years, most recently as a cheap paperback which has increased the stock in the book market enormously.

The book opens with another description of a close encounter in France. Having been out late examining an archaeological site in Vienne, Baring-Gould finds that night is falling and he tries to persuade the local priest to get one of the villagers to take him back to his lodging. They refuse because of the ‘Loup Garou’ that terrorizes the Marais. No-one will accompany him, even in pairs. Unable to keep his family waiting Baring-Gould elects to return alone, so confirming the impression of the French priest that all Englishmen are mad. He did take the precaution of arming himself with a stout stick but was not required to use it. After studying Baring-Gould’s writings I have established that this event took place in 1850, when he was just 16 years old.

*The Book of Werewolves* is still highly regarded as one of the first serious studies of the folklore surrounding the werewolf. Baring-Gould says in his introductory chapter that his purpose is to outline the descriptions of werewolves in classical literature, in the Norse myths and in medieval legend and then to give some more modern examples. It was a great opportunity for him to demonstrate how widely he had read but also how the topics he was reading differed from the classical studies undertaken by his contemporaries. Greek and Roman sources are dealt with quickly and Baring-Gould rushes on to his beloved Norse texts, pulling out myths of transformation and tales of bad behaviour. He believed that there was a purity in the Norse stream that was muddied in the medieval texts.

Further on in the book the tales are of later European monsters - not supernatural beings but psychotic humans. You sense that Baring-Gould does not personally believe, but that he relishes the exploration and the telling of the tales. This is, in fact, more a horror story than a serious study - a popular account that has retained its fascination for 140 years. The book has been one of the foundation stones of the modern obsession with werewolves and vampires but, in that, it is channeling tales that have horrified people down the years and which were constructed for the purpose of entertainment.

At the time Baring-Gould was writing ‘Werewolves’ he was running his little mission in a cottage at Horbury Brig in Yorkshire. He tells us in his Further Reminiscences that, after the school finished, his pupils would stand on his coat-tails and prevent him from leaving until he had told them a story. 13 At Hurstpierpoint he had based the tales he told the boys on his studies of the Icelandic sagas. Now, I believe, his stories were based on English folk tales, often from Devon. At the same time he was

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13 Sabine Baring-Gould, *Further Reminiscences*, p. 9
listening to and recording new tales from Yorkshire. An article by Baring-Gould was published in Notes and Queries in 1865 under the title ‘Devonshire Household Tales’ \(^{14}\). This article included five tales collected by Baring-Gould. The introduction to those tales is a harbinger of his calls to action on folk song 25 years later:

‘It is of great importance that the household tales of England should be collected, as they have been collected in France, in Germany, in Russia, in Greece, in Scotland &c. … Our antiquarian collectors of folk-lore have hitherto searched for legends, superstitions and charms; let them diligently seek out the household tale and I am sure they will find them still existing. I am now removed from my native county of Devonshire, where I know these tales may be picked up, and I have but a few which I was able to collect. Seeing before me no prospect of being able to continue my search for them I contribute what I have to ’N&Q’ in hopes of setting others on the scent.’

One of the tales was the following:

There was once a lady, very beautiful, and wellborn. For some reason or other she was condemned to die a cruel death.

She pleaded her case, and her beauty and her great goodness touched the judges, till they so far relaxed their severity, as to promise that she should save her neck if she could propose a riddle which they could not answer in three days.

She was given a day to prepare. They came to her in her cell to know the riddle. She said

\begin{verbatim}
Love I sit,
Love I stand;
Love I hold
Fast in hand.
I see Love,
Love sees not me.
Riddle me that,
Or hanged I'll be.'
\end{verbatim}

The judges could not guess, so she was acquitted. Then she gave them the explanation. She had a dog called ‘Love.’ She had killed it, and with its skin had made socks for her shoes - on these she stood; gloves for her hands - and these she held; a seat for her chair - on that she sat; she looked at her gloves and she saw Love; but Love saw her no more.

These tales were to re-appear in the following year as part of an ambitious appendix on ‘Household Tales’ that Baring-Gould contributed to William Henderson’s Folklore of the Northern Counties in 1866.\(^{15}\) This was Baring-Gould’s first major contribution to the study of English folklore. He also supplied a number of anecdotes for the book and many of these survived into the second edition of Henderson’s book when it was re-published by the Folklore Society in 1879. The appendix, though, was not included in this edition. I feel that this is a loss since it contained an early attempt by Baring-Gould to classify folk tales by content and plot. Baring-Gould was not the

\(^{14}\) Sabine Baring-Gould, Devonshire Household Tales - i, Notes and Queries Vol 8, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Series (187) Jul 29 1865 (The other two parts of this article appeared in September and October of the same year.)

\(^{15}\) William Henderson, Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties, p. 299-344
first to attempt this but it was an early example of the application of a scientific approach to folklore. The Folklore Society did, in fact, consider adopting and improving Baring-Gould’s system but did not go forward with the proposal. This classification was, though, included by Charlotte Burne as an appendix to her *Handbook of Folklore* in 1913. In Baring-Gould’s papers there is a small notebook in which he developed this classification and it is plain that he continued to work on his system after its original publication. Others however, have continued the work and expanded the concept considerably. Stith Thompson’s ‘Motif-Index of Folk Literature’, for example runs to 6 volumes.

Many years later, in 1913, Baring-Gould wrote *A Book of Folklore*. This is a strange little ramble through the subject in which he never really gets to the point, though he does bring together a number of the themes that he had dealt with in other places over the years. It is, to me at any rate, the least satisfactory of the books that he wrote on the subject.

It is worth mentioning in passing his four books of fairy stories. *Fairy tales from Grimm* was published in 1894 and was introduced by a lengthy preface on fairy stories. In the same year he collaborated with the artist A. J. Gaskin to produce *A Book of Fairy Tales*, a collection of European tales, the majority drawn from the collection of Perrault, beautifully illustrated in the ‘Arts and Crafts’ style. In his introduction Baring-Gould promised a companion volume to his young readers in which he would give some English fairy stories. This was *Old English Fairy Tales* published in the following year. There is then a gap of four years before his final venture into fairyland; *The Crock of Gold* in 1889. In this he has written tales based on a range of ideas, which included foreign tales, but translated to an English setting. The collection includes, interestingly a tale based on a ballad he collected on Dartmoor from Richard Gregory, *The Fiend Knight* - a version of *The Outlandish Knight* that Baring-Gould believed might have had a different root to the usual version of the ballad. In each of the last three collections he gives notes about their origins in the same way as he did with folk songs.

I have now given a few examples of his writing and I will try to resist the temptation to carry on. I think that I have made my point that the interest in what we call folklore was deeply ingrained in Baring-Gould and that we can see the development of that interest throughout his life. Apart from the books and articles that deal directly with the material we find all manner of anecdotes about people’s lore and customs scattered throughout his writing and they help give Baring-Gould’s work its charm. They also demonstrate his interest in what country people believed and his willingness to listen to them. He also used folklore to give depth to his novels. In his first adult novel, the semi-autobiographical *Through Flood and Flame* the Padfoot: “a sort of spirit’ they say’ like a white dog wi’ goggle een”, threatens to make an appearance in the first chapter. Further into the book there is a nasty case of drowning.

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'His body has not, however, been recovered as yet, notwithstanding that the drag has been used, and that a loaf weighted with quicksilver has been floated on the canal -’

‘What, Sir?’

‘Ah! You did not understand. When a body is lost in a river or canal, it is the custom here for a penny loaf, with six penn’orth of mercury in it, to be launched on the water. Popular superstition avers that the bread will remain stationary over the spot where the corpse lies’

This is, of course, a very ancient belief, and often the loaf would also carry a candle. It also occurs in the old ballad ‘Young Hunting’ where an intelligent speaking bird with a grudge advises the divers ‘leave off your ducking in the day and duck all in the night. Where ever that luckless knight lies slain, the candles will shine bright.’

Baring-Gould’s first encounter with the belief was when he was in Horbury.

‘A curious instance of superstition occurred whilst I was at Horbury-Brig. A man had been drowned in the Calder, and his body had not been recovered. It was not known where he had fallen in. So the people got a newly baked loaf, stuck a candle in it, lighted this, and set it afloat on the water, and where it rested stationary, there they dragged and, singularly enough, at this place brought up the body.’

Henderson also records the practice and describes how on 21st October 1860 a little child called Charles Colling fell into the river near Durham and drowned and that his family used a loaf weighted with mercury to seek for his corpse - without success on this occasion.

The Folklore of Song

My original intention for this paper was for its main focus to be on Baring-Gould’s analysis of folklore in the songs that he collected. When I came to look more closely, though, I found that there were surprisingly few cases in the song collections where he had actually examined and written about the songs from the perspective of the lore within them. More frequently it is the other way round where, in the context of studying lore he has introduced song to support his thesis. Let us look, though, at a few examples of folklore in the songs that he collected, starting with an example of a song that brings in the theme of shape-shifting. Baring-Gould writes

‘There is a ballad sung by the English peasantry that has been picked up by collectors in Kent, Somerset, and Devon. It is entitled At the Setting of the Sun, and begins thus:

Come all you young fellows that carry a gun,
Beware of late shooting when daylight is done;
For 'tis little you reckon what hazards you run,
I shot my true love at the setting of the sun.

In a shower of rain, as my darling did hie
All under the bushes to keep herself dry,
With her head in her apron, I thought her a swan,

20 Henderson, Folk Lore of the Northern Counties, p. 44
And I shot my true love at the setting of the sun.

In the Devonshire version of the story:

In the night the fair maid as a white swan appears;
She says, O my true love, quick, dry up your tears,
I freely forgive you, I have Paradise won;
I was shot by my true love at the setting of the sun.

But in the Somerset version the young man is had up before the magistrates and tried for his life.

In six weeks' time, when the 'sizes came on,
Young Polly appeared in the form of a swan,
Crying, Jimmy, young Jimmy, young Jimmy is clear;
He never shall be hung for the shooting of his dear.

And he is, of course, acquitted.’

He goes on

‘The transformation of the damsel into a swan stalking into the Court and proclaiming the innocence of her lover is unquestionably the earlier form of the ballad; the Devonshire version is a later rationalising of the incident. Now, in neither form is the ballad very ancient; and in the passage of the girl's soul into a swan we can see how that among our peasantry to a late period the notion of transmigration has survived.21

The song itself is probably of Irish origin and, as Baring-Gould says, it may not be all that old but the theme of the swan being transformed has deep roots in ancient myth and occurs in many different cultures. It is perhaps surprising that he doesn’t bring in, as he did in A Book of Werewolves, the tale from the Icelandic sagas of the three swan-maidens who laid their swan-skins beside them on the shore and so were not able to fly away when the hero approached them. This same tale is still told of seal-maidens in Cornwall and in the Scottish Islands who exhibit various degrees of willingness to stay with their human partners but always, in the end, put their skins back on and return to their native environment.

In an article in Curious Myths of the Middle Ages 22 he explores the folklore of the Swan transformations more thoroughly, identifying examples from ancient cultures from classical Greek, for example, where Zeus appeared to Leda as a swan in order to seduce her, to the ancient Sanskrit tales of the swan-like Apsaras, the houris of the Vedic heaven who receive to their arms the souls of dead heroes and who sometimes take temporary human husbands - always in the end, though, soaring away to heaven. He also suggests that the popular images of angels as humans with swan’s wings derives from the classical depictions of these legends.

Another of Baring-Gould’s fascinations was the Corpse-Candle or, as he called it, ‘The Blue Flame’. His account is as follows:

‘A prevalent superstition when I was a child was that a flame from the churchyard would travel along the lanes to the house of one who was about to die and tarry there till death occurred, when two flames would go side by side to the graveyard.’  

This is an idea which he re-visited many times over the years and, although he never collected a song on this theme, he felt the need to write one, using a traditional tune.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{All under the stars, and beneath the green tree} \\
&\text{All over the sward and along the cold lea} \\
&\text{A little blue flame} \\
&\text{A fluttering came} \\
&\text{It came from the churchyard for you or for me}
\end{align*}
\]

The narrator is a mother whose child lies sick in bed. She prays that the blue flame will pass her door but it doesn’t and shortly after two small blue flames can be seen making their way back to the churchyard. That was the romantic Baring-Gould. The pragmatic side of him describes an incident that involved his collaborator in song-collecting, Frederick Bussell

‘That there may be an amount of gas that is luminous escaping from a tomb is possible enough. I had dining with me a friend who is now a vice-principle of a college in Oxford. To reach his home he had to pass our churchyard, and he came back in terror as he had seen a blue light dancing above a grave. But that these flames should travel down roads and seek houses where there is one dying is, of course, an exaggeration and untenable.’  

And having thus critically injured the idea he does his best to resuscitate it with a further 13 pages on the topic. I hope that, by now, you are beginning to see the contradictions that are evident in Baring-Gould’s position that I will talk more about shortly.

One of the songs that has fascinated me for some time is ‘Cold Blows the Wind’ which brings together the themes of the revenant spirit and wit combat.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Cold blows the wind tonight, sweet-heart} \\
&\text{Cold are the drops of rain} \\
&\text{The very first love that ever I had} \\
&\text{In Greenwood he was slain}
\end{align*}
\]

The woman weeps by the grave of her lost lover for the requisite year and a day, after which time his ghost appears to ask her why she is still weeping. The maiden asks for a kiss, which Baring-Gould proposes is to release her from her vows. The ghost replies that, should she kiss him, she would die

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Cold are my lips in death, sweet-heart,} \\
&\text{My breath is earthy strong} \\
&\text{If you do touch my clay-cold lips} \\
&\text{Your time will not be long.}
\end{align*}
\]

And he challenges her with a riddle

\[
\text{Go fetch me a light from dungeon deep}
\]

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Wring water from a stone
And likewise milk from a maiden's breast
Which never maid hath none.

She, being experienced in these matters knows that, when presented with some very unlikely riddles, she should come up with equally improbable answers:

She stroke a light from out of a flint
An ice-ball squeezed she
She pressed the milk from a Johanniswort
And so she did all three

I am sure that you will agree that while the answers to riddles one and two just about scrape by, number three is a bit odd. Many of us know that St John’s Wort is an antidepressant. A few may know that its botanical name ‘hypericum’ is derived from the ancient practice of putting a sprig of St John’s Wort above a picture to ward off evil spirits 25. But does anyone know how you get milk from it? I have puzzled over this for some time. Baring-Gould has published different versions of this song, together with his various theories on its meaning in a number of accounts. In his book Strange Survivals he identifies ‘Johnswort’ as - the Dandelion! 26 This is good as far as milky sap is concerned but, unless I am missing something, it’s pretty poor botany - and Baring-Gould was usually well up on his wild flowers. In any case, squeezing a dandelion is hardly a maiden’s breast.

When I was talking with Shan about this she reminded me that if you squeeze the yellow flower of St John ’s Wort you will get a red liquid – so blood, rather than milk. We did try an experiment when out walking and tried squeezing other parts of the plant – no milk. The mystery remains. But it was good enough for the ghost in the song who now releases his lover. She rapidly regains her composure and the song ends:

Now I have mourned upon his grave
A twelvemonth and a day
I'll set my sail before the wind
To waft me far away

Not all of the versions he collected have the riddling but in one version she does get the kiss which should have killed her but, luckily, at that very moment, a bramble leaf drops between their lips and saves her.

Conclusions:
I would like, now to start to draw the strings of my rag-bag together. I hope that I have demonstrated that Baring-Gould often chose to use folklore in the fabric of his writing because it was so interesting and important to him and because he was, above all, a storyteller. In fact he was one of a number of Victorian writers such as Kingsley and Carroll who used folklore or traditional tales as an integral part of their writing.

So, I believe, he was meeting an interest in Victorian popular culture. For much of the period since his death there has been a divide between the serious world of the novel and the story. In recent years writers like Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter have brought respectability back to the use of traditional story-forms. That this should be so is not perhaps, a surprise. We rehearse our beliefs through our rituals and through the stories that we tell.

It has been said that, in the homesteads of old, stories held back the darkness. Padraic Colum proposes that it was the coming of light, first as candles in place of dips and then from electricity that drove the storyteller, and so the tale, away from the hearth. It survives best in those places with the least light – metaphorically as well as literally. But in the modern world we still have our myths and lore – you have only to listen to the news on the radio, to read the Sun or to search the Internet. People still tell stories, though they don’t always realize it – they use them in everyday conversation. You, like me, will often have heard men give graphic accounts of motorways they have traveled, while women recount tales of people and what they did or said over the garden fence.

I do, actually, like the use of the term ‘Popular Antiquities’. I find it useful in that it distinguishes the beliefs of the past from the beliefs of the present – which is ‘Popular Culture.’ The latter, of course, may become the former. Present beliefs embrace those associated with the popular music, popular literature etc. of the time – maybe even the ‘popular religion’.

So the songs that we sing are an expression of our popular culture. When he was collecting songs Baring-Gould was seeking the antique and rejected the current ‘popular music’. From our own perspective we find those, now antique, songs just as interesting. Luckily Baring-Gould recorded enough of them for us to have a good picture of the full repertoire of his singers.

When we consider Popular Culture then, inevitably, we have to ask how firm the boundaries between Folklore and Religion actually are. The scope of both is the beliefs of ‘The People’. The key difference is that one set of beliefs is sanctioned by the church. The other is seen as unauthorized, sometimes dangerous. In looking at folklore on a global basis I have seen writers who for the sake of balance, will include references to Christian beliefs such as the Transfiguration, given equal weight to ideas that Christians would regard as the mythology of other religions.

I wondered for some time what Baring-Gould’s position would have been on this. How clearly would he have seen the division between ‘Folklore’ and ‘Religion.’ I felt that, at times, the boundaries were very thin and that when you look at his 15 volume Lives of the Saints for example, you cannot help but feel that this is more story than history. Then I read something that he said about the writing of that epic. He was of the opinion that Alban Butler, the author whose work he was, in effect, revising had composed his work

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27 Introduction by Padraic Colum to The Brothers Grimm, The Complete Fairy Tales, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1997).
‘For the purpose of edification and with little regard to the historical truth. I was well aware that the task was certain to entail great labour and severe criticism. I knew that some of those who had been enshrined in the great martyrlogies had as little claim to be considered as historical personages as Cinderella and Goody Twoshoes; and as slender justification for their elevation to the calendars of saints.’

Baring-Gould was a spiritual man but his ‘world-view’ had a place for lore as well as religion. He could see the spiritual in what might appear to others mundane.

I also wondered what Baring-Gould himself believed and here there is much less consistency. In a number of the examples that I have quoted above you can see him in the role of rational analyst. At other times, though you get a glimpse of a man who was less detached, for whom ghosts, pixies, and ancient tales were real. The man who will replace witchcraft with Scurvy as a reason for Grettir’s death but who will dig to find his head.

Let me give you a more personal example.

‘When little Beatrice was ill, cutting teeth and with whooping cough, I did not think that the nurse-girl was sufficiently alert to attend to her, and so advised my wife to go into the bedroom, and sleep with Beatrice. I was then in the room, above the drawing-room. I was awoke about the middle of the night by my wife, who came in and said: “I cannot sleep. I hear people tramping, carrying something down the stairs. I sat up and argued with her. It was a windy night, and the noise might be caused by the gale. As I was speaking there sounded three heavy strokes as if made by a clenched fist against the partition between the bedroom and the dressing-room. “It is only the starting of the timber,” said I, and I induced my wife to go back to her bed. Next day, so little did we think that Beatrice was in a serious condition, that we went off to make a call in Launceston. On our return I was sitting in the drawing-room, and my wife fetched the child, who was dressed, and took her down into the library. I heard a cry, and ran in, and found that the child had died on her mother’s knees. Her coffin was carried down the staircase, as my wife had heard on the night before her death.’

His biography is punctuated with personal anecdotes. He told in detail of the white witches that he had met. He frequently recounts the tales that were told to him and the conversations that he had. He tells us about the ghosts that were close to him - sometimes dismissed with a laugh as with Bussell’s experience with the blue flame, sometimes treated with apparent belief as in the story we just heard. He analyses the ballads and extracts the historical and mythological from them but then he will frequently tell a little story that draws the analytical back to the personal.

In the case of Cold Blows the Wind, for example.

‘I knew a handsome old woman, wife of a farmer of my neighbourhood in Devon; who had betrothed herself to a youth in the place, but he died before the wedding came off. After a sufficient time had elapsed she got engaged to the farmer, whom she eventually married. Directly after this the dead lover appeared to her at night and said:

29 Sabine Baring-Gould, Early Reminiscences, p 159.
“Joanna, you cannot marry another than me, till you have returned my present, the red silk handkerchief. I'll stop it till I have that back.” She left her bed and took the kerchief out of a drawer and handed it to him, whereupon he disappeared. If remonstrated with, and told that this was a dream, she would wax warm and say: “I know it is true. I know it, for the silk handkerchief disappeared from that night. And if you'd ha' opened his grave you'd ha' found it in his coffin”.  

And with that, I will end my own ramble. I hope that you have enjoyed it and that you will be tempted to read some of Baring-Gould’s writing on folklore.

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The Book of Werewolves, published by Smith Elder in 1865, is one of Sabine Baring-Gould’s earliest works. It is also one of the least well-known. It has always received the very barest of mentions in most biographies of Baring-Gould – Bickford Dickinson’s classic 1970 biography, for instance, doesn’t mention the writing or the publication of the work at all.

One obvious reason for this neglect is that Baring-Gould himself didn’t write much that has survived about the aims of the little volume, its publication or its reception. He doesn’t mention it at all in either the Early Reminiscences or the Further Reminiscences that he published late in his life and so far I’ve not found any surviving correspondence with publishers about the book either.

For those unfamiliar with the work, I should start by describing briefly what the book is and what it seems to be trying to do (in the absence of any leads from Baring-Gould himself). I’d also like to give you a little taste of it’s tone – just to whet your appetite if you’ve not already read it. The book on its most basic level is an anthology of werewolf myths, folklore and related stories from around the world. It contains stories of werewolves from: the ancient world – from Ovid, Virgil, Pliny etc; from medieval Lithuania, Germany, Slovakia, and other central European countries; and from the Norse sagas – including the well-known Saga of the Volsungs. In fact, the book was inspired by Baring-Gould’s own trip to Iceland three years earlier and by the stories that he learned there – in particular by his visit to the so-called ‘Vampire’s Grave’, although there’s no actual werewolf in that tale, only a vampire with ‘wolf-grey hair’.2

So among the stories in The Book of Werewolves we have, for instance the story of the tyrannous Russian nobleman who is turned into a werewolf as a punishment for his blasphemies.3 There’s also the Icelandic tale about the two brothers Sigmund and Sinfjotli who try on a pair of enchanted wolfskins belonging to a witch and get stuck inside them, unable to get out again, while the nature of the wolves begins to take over their character.4 And there’s the German tale of a priest approached by a werewolf in the woods and asked to give the last rites to a woman who’s been transformed into a she-wolf.5 Flanking these stories of werewolves are more general chapters which demonstrate the pervasiveness of shape-shifting beliefs around the

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4 Ibid., p. 21-22.

5 Ibid., p. 49.
globe by relating stories which Baring-Gould collected from translations of the Indian Vedas and other religious texts, and from travel writing about China, Tibet, North America and the Middle East. So we are told, for instance the story of the Native American warrior who happily marries a beaver, and the less happy tale of the Indian ruler who is allowed to marry a heavenly damsel on the condition that she never sees him naked. All goes well until they’re both woken up by a storm in the middle of the night. He gets up, a flash of lightning reveals his nakedness to his wife – and she’s turned into a swan forever.6

Having demonstrated by these shape-shifting stories that all cultures around the world are concerned with the blurry line of demarcation between the human and the bestial, Baring-Gould then puts his stories of furry ‘literal’ werewolves into context, with a string of chapters about bestial behaviour in humans through the ages – with dreadful tales about men (and they are almost exclusively about men) who are metaphorically ‘furry on the inside’ (to borrow a phrase from Angela Carter’s modern fairytale ‘A Company of Wolves’). In this section of the book, we have three whole chapters devoted to the bloody biography of the Breton aristocrat Gilles de Retz – claimed to be the original Bluebeard – who was accused of murdering around 800 children in seven years, in the fifteenth century. In court, we are told, Laval’s servant confessed that the aristocrat’s greatest pleasure was ‘to welter in their blood. His servants would stab a child in the jugular vein and let the blood squirt over him’.7 There is also the story of M Bertrand, a junior officer with a voracious urge to disinter and then rip apart corpses, who was arrested in Paris in 1849.8 And there’s another tale from the same year – 1849 – but set in Austria, about a pauper who is present at the burning down of an inn. Driven by extreme hunger, he tastes the roasted flesh of the dead innkeeper – and from then on develops an insatiable taste for human flesh which he satisfies over the next three years by killing and eating fourteen children. He’s finally caught, literally red-handed and mid-roast.9

These stories are collected from French, German and Latin histories and works of anthropology (all of which, of course, Baring-Gould could read in their originals), as well as from the work of English historians and travel writers. So the book is, to begin with, a really remarkable work of scholarship – a book that could only have been produced by the sort of polymath that Baring-Gould was (he could speak five languages by the time he was seventeen).10 The purpose of all this research, ultimately, was to prove Baring-Gould’s hypothesis about the origin of werewolves. He concludes that there is:

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6 Ibid., p. 116-7, 129.
7 Ibid., p. 158.
8 Ibid., p. 184-5.
9 Ibid., p. 177-8.
10 Keith Lister, Half My Life, p. 16.
‘... an innate craving for blood implanted in certain natures, restrained under ordinary circumstances, but breaking forth occasionally, accompanied by hallucination, leading in most cases to cannibalism.’\(^{11}\)

The hypothesis is a strikingly modern, psychoanalytic one – particularly when you bear in mind that he was writing more than three decades before Freud began to publish on his own theories about repression!

In addition to identifying werewolfism as a ‘species of madness’, Baring-Gould also speculated that werewolf *myths* developed, in early European society, as a result of those suffering from such blood lust wrapping themselves in animal skins. He suggests that:

‘... popular superstition soon invested them with supernatural powers, and they were supposed to assume the forms of the beasts in whose skins they were disguised.’\(^{12}\)

And he speculates that language also played a role in encouraging this superstition, noting that in both Anglo-Saxon and Norse, the term *vagr* had two meanings: both a wolf, but also a godless or a restless man – so those two meanings could easily have become confused in the popular imagination.\(^{13}\)

It’s interesting to read Baring-Gould’s work in relation to several important Victorian preoccupations. It was in the 1860s, when the *Book of Werewolves* was published, that the science of *philology* first became popular in Britain. This was the comparative study of different languages, in order to identify which were oldest, which were related to each other, and which could be viewed as forming linguistic ‘families’. The pioneer of this study was a German scholar Max Muller, who in 1861 proved that the English language was related to the Germanic and Norse languages. These insights quickly led to claims that nations with related languages must also have cultural and racial ties – so by the later decades of the nineteenth century, there were numerous claims, for instance, that English literature, English political institutions, and even the English ‘national character’ were essentially ‘Teutonic’.\(^{14}\) Baring-Gould’s interest in tracing links between the werewolf folklore of different North European nations was therefore very much a product of his time, and his particular interest in Norse mythology – which he viewed as older and purer than any other mythology in the world – should also be viewed in the context of philological debates about the origin of European languages and culture.

His work can also be read in relation to the rise of the natural sciences in the nineteenth century, and in particular in relation to Darwinism. His investigation of the line of demarcation between the animal and the human – between man and wolf – was being made just six years after the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* which likewise offered no privileged and distinct place to the human in the natural order. And I think that thinking about the *Origin of Species* and the *Book of


\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 40-41.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 41.

Werewolves together in this way can also cast a very interesting light on Baring-Gould’s later fiction too. The author and playwright J.M. Barrie, best known for writing Peter Pan, complained that in most of Baring-Gould’s male characters ‘the brute element has such a mastery as to keep the other elements out of sight’. For Barrie – for whom the aim of fiction was to teach by moral example – this was simply a failing. But for us, looking back, I think we can see this as a really interesting response to the challenges that Darwinism was posing to traditional morality.

Darwin was also very interested in the survival of primitive emotions in humans, which although suppressed retained their power and were liable to mutiny. Although Darwin’s own focus was on primal fear, it’s not difficult to see how that might have partly inspired Baring-Gould’s fascination with the possibility of an animalistic ‘blood lust’ that still survived in men. Finally, as Gillian Beer has pointed out, metamorphosis was central to Darwin’s conception of life. It underpinned his model of evolution. In Darwin’s own work, of course, this metamorphosis was explicitly twinned with the notions of development, succession and irreversible growth. However, as Beer has argued, his theory could also be extrapolated to suggest the possibility of random and disordered change, instead of the assurance of irreversible upward growth. And she has linked this to Victorian fantasies – like Alice in Wonderland – which disrupt the sequence of growth (so Alice’s size fluctuates according to which size of the mushroom she eats). I think it’s also a really interesting way of understanding Baring-Gould’s interest in the ‘backwards’ metamorphosis from human to animal that was involved in lycanthropy or werewolfism.

Baring-Gould’s collecting of werewolf myths from around the world can also be viewed as in part a product of nineteenth-century British imperialism, and as typical of that Victorian mania for collecting and classifying – which resulted not only in the Great Exhibition of 1851, but also in those cabinets of birds, butterflies and other curiosities with which we still associate the century. I think, though, that it’s partly because the book has tended to be viewed only as a ‘collection’ or an ‘anthology’ – as a work of scholarship – that the Book of Werewolves hasn’t attracted as much attention as it should have done. Whenever it is discussed, it tends to be described only as ‘a reference book’ – and reference books, of course, eventually become obsolete for most readers.

It’s not only studies of Victorian literature that tend to disregard the book. There have been several studies of the cultural history of werewolfism, or ‘lycanthropy’, written in recent years – and these often omit Baring-Gould’s work entirely, viewing it as simply an outdated study that preceded their own. The works that do include

17 Ibid., p. 106.
Baring-Gould, as Charlotte Ottern does (in her *Lycanthropy Reader*), simply cherry pick from his collection of stories – so in her section on ‘trial records and historical accounts’, she includes the case of the French werewolf Jean Grenier – taken from Sabine Baring-Gould – but she doesn’t discuss Baring-Gould himself as an author on werewolves – she treats him simply as a transparent editor or a compiler of source material.\(^{18}\)

What I’d like to argue here, is that *The Book of Werewolves* should actually be read as a work of literature – and not merely as an editorial project. I think the *Book of Werewolves* might have suffered partly because our dominant image of Sabine Baring-Gould today is not of him as a novelist, but rather (as he wished, in fact) as the compiler of *Songs of the West*. If we think of him as primarily a ‘collector’ of folklore, it becomes easy to imagine his interest in werewolves as detached and dry – academic. This is the view that seems to be taken, for instance, by the authors of a website about fantasy fiction that I found. To the authors of fantasticfiction.com, Baring-Gould’s attitude to werewolves was ‘a typically nineteenth century approach [...] methodical, rational, mechanistic’.\(^{19}\)

However, it is now widely recognised that *Songs of the West* was not simply a work of anthologising – Baring-Gould rewrote and ‘improved’ many of the songs he collected – infamously, of course taking any innuendo out of songs like *Strawberry Fair*. So there’s maybe an argument for viewing those songs as literary works based on oral tradition. It’s odd, but when a contemporary writer subverts traditional narratives, like fairytales, we’re very ready to call their work ‘literature’. But it seems we’re not very willing to credit historical figures like Baring-Gould, who ‘moralised’ or ‘tidied up’ traditional narratives with the same sort of ‘literary’ status. I think we ought to in the case of the *Book of Werewolves*.

To support this argument, it makes sense at this point to provide a brief taste of the book itself. The following excerpt is from a Slovakian story about a werewulf with nine daughters, eight of whom he kills and throws into a pit. The extract begins with the youngest and most beautiful one still alive:

‘The youngest knew well that her father was a werewolf, and she was grieved that her sisters did not return; she thought, “Now where can they be? Has my father kept them for companionship; or to help him in his work?” So she made the food which she was to take him, and crept cautiously through the wood. When she came near the place where her father worked, she heard his strokes felling timber and smelt smoke. She saw presently a large fire and two human heads roasting at it. Turning from the fire, she went in the direction of the axe-strokes, and found her father. “See”, she said, “father, I have brought you food”. “That is a good lass”, said he. “Now stack the wood for me whilst I eat”. “But where are my sisters?” she asked. “Down in yon valley drawing wood”, he replied; “follow me and I will bring you to them”. They came to the pit; then he told her that he had dug it for a grave. “Now”, said he, “you must die, and be cast into the pit with your

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\(^{19}\) www.fantasticfiction.com.
sisters”. “Turn aside, father”, she asked, “whilst I strip off my clothes, and then slay me if you will”. He turned aside as she requested, and then – tchich! she gave him a push, and he tumbled headlong into the hole he had dug for her. She fled for her life, for the werewolf was not injured, and he would soon scramble out of the pit. Now she hears his howls resounding through the gloomy alleys of the forest, and swift as the wind she runs. She hears the tramp of his approaching feet, and the snuffle of his breath...  

The entirety of the story takes up three pages of the book. It is difficult not to conclude that if Baring-Gould had simply wanted to recount the bare facts of the narrative, as an anthropologist, then the account of it could have been a lot shorter. Instead, he gives space to scene setting and atmosphere in many of his retellings of the werewolf stories – a feature that has been noted as one of the greatest strengths of his later novel-writing. The tale of Jean Grenier, a young werewolf from France, for instance, begins in leisurely fashion:

‘One fine afternoon in the spring, some village girls were tending their sheep on the sand-dunes which intervene between the vast forests of pine covering the greater portion of the present department of landes in the south of France, and the sea. The brightness of the sky, the freshness of the air puffing up off the twinkling Bay of biscay, the hum or song of the wind as it made rich music among the pines which stood like a green uplifted wave on the East, the beauty of the sand-hills speckled with golden cistus, or patched with gentian-blue ... all conspired to fill the peasant maidens with joy.’  

These are enjoyable stories to read, and Baring-Gould has gone to pains to include details that draw us into the narrative. His treatment of the stories is anything but ‘methodical, rational, mechanistic’.  

Even when the stories are recounted one after the other, in very brief detail, the book is much more than a study of comparative folklore; there’s clear evidence of literary techniques being carefully used. In chapter 14 of the book, Baring-Gould recounts three stories of children in Austria disappearing under mysterious circumstances. The first story ends with the ominous line: That little orphan was never seen again. The next story ends: Peter was never seen again. And the third story (now predictably) concludes: The servant-girl was never seen again. Repetition is a recognised technique of the fairy tale genre. It’s often been noted that Angela Carter, for instance, in her modern retellings of fairy tales, incorporates a traditional ‘compulsion to repeat’. And in the same way Baring-Gould is self-consciously (and maybe slightly ironically) incorporating that technique here – he even draws attention to those traditional, repeated lines by printing them in italics.

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21 Ibid., p. 67.  
22 www.fantasticfiction.com  
24 Ibid.  
So this is a literary work. More specifically, I think it should be viewed as part of a particular literary fashion that was dominant in the 1860s. In the 1860s, the ‘sensation novel’ became (for around a decade) immensely popular in British culture. The best remembered sensation novel today is probably Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*. As a genre, sensation fiction aimed to thrill its audience with stories of crime, madness, and violence, set in ordinary English households. With stories of the atavistic behaviour of apparently normal but in fact criminally self-indulgent individuals who lack any sense of self-discipline or social responsibility. Its emergence has often been linked to the amount of law reform that took place in the C19th and to the establishment of the police-force in Britain. That, combined with the rise of mass print culture, led to a public fascination with crime and punishment.  

The genre has also been connected to public anxieties about the social conditions in Victorian Britain. So the frequent stories about poisoning in sensation fiction can be related to concerns about contaminated water and food, while stories about bodies hidden in cellars, secreted in sewers, or butchered and sold as meat can be related to the issue of overcrowded cemeteries.

Significantly, the sensation novel was aimed at a middle class readership. The so-called ‘penny bloods’, which were published in cheap, weekly installments – like today’s weekly magazines or comics – had been thrilling lower class readers with tales of crime and horror since the 1840s. The sensation novel, however, was published in more expensive, and therefore more ‘respectable’ monthly installments and its heroes were typically from the upper middle class. Despite its greater respectability, though, there was much concern at the time about the moral effects that sensation fiction would have on its readers. The Archbishop of York, for instance, led a crusade against it in the press, and an article in the periodical *The Athenaeum* from 1866 is typical of the tone taken by many reviewers. It begins by proclaiming:

“We are in a period of diseased invention. It then goes on to accuse Wilkie Collins of laying bare ‘the blotches and blains which fester beneath the skin and taint the blood of humanity’. And it complains that although criminals might exist in ‘the sinks and sewers of society’ it wasn’t proper that such figures should be ‘displayed in fiction’.

So if you read and enjoyed Sensation Fiction in the nineteenth century – you were liable to be criticised or reprehended for your taste in literature – whether that was by a parent, or a husband or wife. Baring-Gould’s *Book of Werewolves* is interesting, I think, because it’s published just as this sensation literature is at the height of its popularity, and it seems to be deliberately calculated to appeal to fans of sensation fiction. So you could read what seemed to be a scholarly study of comparative

folklore – and yet still be thrilled by terrible crimes, and with descriptions of the horrors ‘beneath the skin of humanity’.

There are numerous points in the book where Baring-Gould seems to be deliberately aiming to thrill his readers. This, for instance is his introduction to the collection:

‘I shall never forget the walk I took one night in Vienne, after having accomplished the examination of an unknown Druidical relic, the Pierre labie, at La Rondelle, near Champigny. I had learned of the existence of this cromlech only on my arrival at Champigny in the afternoon, and I had started to visit the curiosity without calculating the time it would take me to reach it and return. Suffice it to say that I discovered the venerable pile of grey stones as the sun set, and I expended the last lights of evening in planning and sketching. I then turned my face homeward. […] A small hamlet was at no great distance, and I betook myself thither, in the hopes of hiring a trap to convey me to the post-house, but I was disappointed. Few in the place could speak French, and the priest, when I applied to him, assured me that he believed there was no better conveyance in the place than a common charrue with its solid wooden wheels […] Out spoke then the mayor – “Monsieur can never go back tonight across the flats because of the – the –” and his voice dropped; “the loup-garoux”. ’

So the book begins with Baring-Gould having to walk at night across a plain believed to be haunted by a werewolf. Not only are the horrors of sacrificing druids invoked (and they were enjoying popularity at the time, among novelists, dramatists and poets) but the setting at sundown is the classic opening to a horror story.

Furthermore, although the settings of many of Baring-Gould’s werewolf stories are historical and European, he terrorises his readers with the suggestion that such horrors may still exist – and even in Britain. His introduction warns readers that:

We may be a little too hasty in concluding that [the werewolf] is extinct. He may still prowl in Abyssinian forests, range still over Asiatic steppes, and be found howling dismally in some padded room of a Hanwell or a Bedlam (both asylums).

And at the end of his story of Jean Grenier, the French werewolf who fed on children, he concludes:

‘It is very fearful to contemplate that there may still exist persons in the world filled with a morbid craving for human blood, which is ready to impel them to commit the most horrible atrocities, should they escape the vigilance of their guards, or break the bars of the madhouse which restrains them.’

He even intimates that these terrors may lurk in apparently safe and familiar domestic settings. In chapter nine, on the causes of lycanthropy, he warns:

‘Cruelty may remain latent till, by some accident, it is aroused, and then it will break forth in a devouring flame. … A word, a glance, a touch, are sufficient to fire the magazine of passion in the heart, and to desolate for ever an existence. It is the same with

32 Ibid., p. 76.
bloodthirstiness. It may smoulder in the bosom which is most cherished by us, and we may be perfectly unconscious of its existence there.’ 33

So here, as in the sensation novel of the same decade, we are faced with the potential for terrible passions and crimes within the safety of the home.

The sensationalism of The Book of Werewolves also sheds an interesting light on Baring-Gould’s later fiction. One of the last scholars to write about Baring-Gould’s novels was the 1960’s critic William J. Hyde. One of the things that Hyde bewailed in Baring-Gould’s fiction was the way in which:

‘... grotesque intrigues, violent murders or intended murders, concealed identities and abruptly vanishing and reappearing characters are made to render up a fund of action and suspense time and again.’ 34

Hyde puzzled over ‘the inconsistency between strains of brutality and tasteless humour in the novels and the benevolent calm of their author in private life’ and he concluded that the solution must lie in ‘Baring-Gould’s ultimate disbelief in novels’, suggesting that Baring-Gould only wrote novels as a means of covertly preaching to the masses and of raising funds for good works.35

However, if we think about the sensationalism that’s present in The Book of Werewolves, it’s difficult not to detect a real sense of relish in Baring-Gould’s telling of the tales. In the section telling the story of Gilles de Retz, the French aristocrat with a taste for bathing in blood, he boasts that the story contains ‘horrors probably unsurpassed in the whole volume of the world’s history’. 36 And he stresses that he’s managed to find and use new source material, whereas earlier English accounts of the aristocrat’s crimes were ‘meagre’ and ‘very incomplete’.37

Moreover, virtually without exception, the werewulf tales seem to be recounted without any explicit moral commentary. They seem largely to be told for the sheer joy of terrorising.

Hyde was writing before nineteenth-century sensation fiction had really been recognised by critics as being anything other than simply trash: before critics had really begun to identify the social issues – like gender politics, class conflict or population growth – that are often dealt with in sensation novels, beneath the façade of simply thrilling and terrorising. And I think that it is for that reason that he’s too quick to dismiss the sensationalism which Baring-Gould seems to have experimented with in The Book of Werewolves and then later introduced into his novels. His image of Baring-Gould as a benevolent, hymn-writing, Victorian parson whose only interest in crime was as a way of reaching the masses is also rather oversimplified I think. Bickford Dickinson seems to have been much closer to the mark when he suggested that:

33 Ibid., p. 103.
36 Sabine Baring-Gould The Book of Werewolves, p. 133.
37 Ibid., p. 132.
Beneath the surface of his genuinely spiritual nature, and often in conflict with it, lay strange depths that drew him to those dark byways that underlie all folklore.\(^{38}\)

The *Book of Werewolves* is really invaluable for reminding us, then, how complex an author Baring-Gould was. It gives us one of the clearest glimpses into an aspect of his interests and character that’s too easily ignored if he’s remembered primarily as the author of *Onward Christian Soldiers*. It’s also a book that should remind us how influential he was on English popular culture. Baring-Gould didn’t by an means *introduce* the werewolf to English culture. In the twelfth century, the Bishop of Exeter specified what penance was appropriate for those who believed in werewolves, and there are a few werewolves in Renaissance literature – most famously, a character is diagnosed as suffering from lycanthropy in John Webster’s 1623 play *The Duchess of Malfi*.\(^{39}\) However, the word was sufficiently unfamiliar by 1658 to be included in Edward Philips’ *The New World of English Words*.\(^{40}\) And by the eighteenth century, the werewolf seems to have been almost forgotten as a tradition in England. The word only appears about three times in eighteenth century literature, and in those places it tends to have a footnote explaining what it means, and describing it as a term that ‘still exists in German’.\(^{41}\) It wasn’t until the early twentieth century, and the beginning of the film industry that the werewolf tradition suddenly began to be widespread in Anglo-American culture.

Baring-Gould’s book needs, I think, to be recognised as an important element in that revival of the werewolf tradition. There was one other nineteenth-century werewolf text: *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf*, a novel by George W.M. Reynolds, an author of sensation fiction, which was published in 1846-7 in serial form.\(^{42}\) That work is typically included in every chronology of the werewolf – and recognised as an important stage in the revival of the tradition – despite the fact that Wagner himself only appears in about half of the novel named after him. Moreover, Reynolds’ Wagner, also lacks many of the qualities of the werewolf that are now central to the tradition. He never eats anybody, for a start: he simply spends the novel rushing around in wolf form, clumsily knocking things over. He doesn’t transform at full moon. There’s also no psychological interest in the nature of his bestiality: he’s simply been turned into a werewolf as part of a deal with the devil. And there are no tell-tale signs of his condition when he’s a man either.

By contrast, in Baring-Gould’s werewolf text as in modern werewolf film and literature, there’s real interest in the dividing line between human and animal. And

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40 Edward Philips, *The New World of English Words*, or, A General Dictionary Containing the Interpretations of Such Hard Words as are Derived from Other Languages (London: Nath. Brooke, 1658).
42 George W. M. Reynolds, *Wagner the Werewolf*, ed. by Dick Collins (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006 [1853]).
his werewolves that are literally furry do transform at full moon. Baring-Gould’s werewolves are also defined by their taste for human blood. And they are recognisable when they’re men because of their large hands, hairy palms and eyebrows that meet in the centre. And although he doesn’t explicitly acknowledge this himself, there’s clearly a sexual element to werewolfism in his stories. Almost without exception, his male werewolves prefer to eat female flesh – a tradition that is central to C20th werewolf narratives, whether you’re watching The Howling or reading Angela Carter’s Company of Wolves.

So Baring-Gould’s book is really one of the clearest British links between the Renaissance interest in werewolves and the twentieth century’s interest in them. And I think there’s also a good chance that Baring-Gould may have been consciously aiming to revive the werewolf tradition in England. He begins chapter eight of his book by complaining that ‘English folklore is singularly barren of werewolf stories’. And given the relish with which he relates European werewolf stories, I don’t think that line is supposed to trumpet the superiority of English reason, but rather to lament the paucity of English folklore. Shortly after this, he observes that although the werewolf ‘remained long in the popular mind’, ‘at present it has disappeared’, subtly suggesting the possibility of the beast’s reappearance in popular culture in the future.

If The Book of Werewolves was written with the aim of restoring the werewolf to the English tradition, then Baring-Gould succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. As Vesna Goldsworthy has demonstrated, the book was a source for Bram Stoker’s Dracula, for a start, whose vampiric count can transform into a wolf – and so via that text it has had an indirect influence on the pervasive twentieth-century obsession with vampires. More directly, though, the werewolf is now a familiar part of our cultural landscape. In the last year, we’ve had Being Human – a TV series about a werewolf living in Bristol; we’ve had a werewolf advertising Frosties cereal; and we’ve had the X-men film Wolverine, which went on general release on May 1st 2009. I think that we need to remember that we may not have that vibrant tradition at all today – were it not for the supposedly mild-mannered Devon composer of ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’!

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43 The Book of Werewolves, p. 77.
44 Ibid.
BROKEN IMAGES
Reverend Prebendary Norman Wallwork

This sermon was preached in the church service at Clare College, Cambridge that formed part of the 2004 Annual gathering

Baring-Gould wrote *Onward Christian Soldiers* during his ordination year of 1864. Though it is still one of the most widely known hymns it is fast fading from the repertoire of most English-speaking congregations. The reason for the hymn’s demise has nothing to do with its original greatness which lasted undisputed for more than a century. The hymn’s fall from grace rests entirely on the fact that its imagery and its language cannot jump the hurdle of critically attuned liturgical usage in the 21st century.

There is an ancient Christian tag – *lex orandi, lex credendi* – which means that the language or rule of prayer governs the language and rule of belief. The church cannot validly pray what it does not believe nor can its beliefs stray from the language of its worship.

When Baring-Gould wrote *Onward Christian Soldiers* its most familiar five verses were totally acceptable to the author and to the editors who published it in their hymn-books. But now a number of its images sit ill at ease with contemporary Christian insights and sensitivities.

The first cluster of images to prove unacceptable is the military one. ‘Armies marching as to war’ was once nothing if it was not once a stirring image. These days few armies actually march. They whiz from place to place in highly powered transport or they creep with stealth.

Once upon a time Hebrews and Christians held the universal view that God went out with their armies when he approved of what they were doing or abandoned them on the field of battle if he thought their cause not to his liking.

Now humanity’s conscience and current Christian morality are both currently divided about the rightness of war and the use of arms. To compare the advance of the church with an advancing army is now a broken image. A once glorious metaphor is now deeply questionable and almost universally scorned.

When Baring-Gould’s hymn was at the height of its popularity no Christian, least of all a Victorian Anglican or an Edwardian Salvationist would have thought of any other towering religious symbol standing alongside the cross. The cross was held high in the hearts and minds of English speaking Christians as they went forth with their banners to conquer the nations. *In this sign conquer* was the vision of Constantine and the conquering cross held sway against the enemies of the church and the empire for two millennia.
But the cross in our generation is no longer about conquest and domination. It is about the possibility of God. In the words of Charles Wesley we look into the face of the crucified Christ and profess:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{Faith cries out, } \text{‘Tis he, ‘tis he,} \\
& \text{My God, that suffers there.} \\
& \text{Ah, show me that happiest place,} \\
& \text{The place of thy people’s abode,} \\
& \text{And hang on a crucified God.}
\end{align*}
\]

The Christ of the contemporary gospel has moved from the language of the conquering hero to that of the wounded God. We are not saved because Christ leads us into battle but because we encounter him in the defeated army of the hungry, the lost, the broken and the abandoned children of the cities and villages of the world. The cross of Jesus does not ‘go on before’ because it is still blooded, still battered and still bruised from the blow of hammers and the nails eternally driven into the hands of God and eternally piercing the wood.

And Satan’s hosts no longer flee as once they did for Baring-Gould. In our day at least Satan’s hosts are singularly unidentifiable! They are certainly no longer intimidated by Christian praise!

And the Christian brothers who lifted up their voices for Baring-Gould must now be identified by name also as sisters. For Baring-Gould, of course, sisters were assumed in the language, silent in the pulpit and invisible at the altar. Brothers do not now lift up their voices without acknowledging their sisters. A church inclusive in its being and inclusive in its behaviour must be inclusive in its praise.

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{Like a mighty army} \\
& \text{Moves the church of God.}
\end{align*}
\]

Rapid growth of Pentecostal or evangelical Christianity in Korea or Africa may seem to epitomise this image but it is a much more vulnerable and gentler church that now struggles in the new Dark Ages of Europe and North America.

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{Brothers we are treading} \\
& \text{Where the saints have trod.}
\end{align*}
\]

Would to God that we were – marvellous and timeless image that it is!

Of course the real Baring-Gould, in his writings and his letters, wrote off all Non-Conformists, all papists, all Orthodox and all fellow Anglicans of the evangelical school as being either misguided or unsound. Only when he had done this was it safe for the Anglo-Catholic remnant so sing:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{We are not divided,} \\
& \text{All one body we,} \\
& \text{One in hope, in doctrine,} \\
& \text{One in charity.}
\end{align*}
\]

There is meant to be something gloriously timeless about the last verse.
Blend with ours your voices  
In the triumph song:  
Glory, laud and honour  
Unto Christ the King,

But you will recall that the happy throng at the last is really an Anglican cathedral choir consisting only of men and angels! So we are left in the end with only one sustainable image of Christ and his church which survives unscathed in this once great hymn. It is the only verse that stands with the church in an age of vulnerability as it did with the church in the days of glory and empire.

Crowns and thrones may perish,  
Kingdoms rise and wane,  
But the Church of Jesus  
Constant will remain:  
Gates of hell can never  
'Gainst that Church prevail;  
We have Christ's own promise,  
And that cannot fail.
Notes on the contributors to this issue

Dr Roger Bristow is the editor of the ‘official’ bibliography of Sabine Baring-Gould’s work – though he is still not ready to regard it as definitive. Once again, he was a co-organiser of the 2009 meeting and has placed the story within the landscape for us. He is also the Newsletter Editor for SBGAS.

Jane Marchand has been a member of SBGAS for over 20 years and is currently our Honorary Secretary. Her main interest in Baring-Gould is in his many antiquarian activities. He is one of a number of C18th and C19th antiquaries who have been the subject of her doctoral research in recent years. She is aiming to complete and publish this work when she retires from her job as archaeologist with the Dartmoor National Park Authority.

Dr. Ron Wawman is another familiar figure to SBGAS members and has devoted his energies over recent years to digging out and interpreting information that has increased our knowledge about Baring-Gould’s life considerably. His transcription of Baring-Gould’s diary, entitled ‘Never Completely Submerged, The Diary of Sabine-Baring-Gould was published in 2009.

Troy White recently joined SBGAS. He is currently a doctoral student at Warwick University. He and his wife LeAnne are from Mississippi and have lived in the UK for two years. His thesis is titled: The Gothic Threshold of Sabine Baring-Gould: The Religion and Gothic Fiction of a Victorian "Squarson." The first chapter discusses Mehalah; the second Mehalah and Wuthering Heights. The third chapter covers Margery of Quether and other Gothic stories written by Baring-Gould in the 1890s.

Dr. Joanne Parker is the Lecturer in Victorian Literature at the University of Exeter's Cornwall Campus. She is the author of England's Darling: The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great (2007), and Written on Stone: The cultural history of British prehistoric monuments (2009) as well as numerous articles on the Victorians, myth and history.

Martin Graebe researches and writes about folk song and folklore as well as performing songs, particularly from the Baring-Gould collection, with his wife Shan. He has given a number of talks to SBGAS as well as to other organisations around the World. He is Chair, Website Editor and Transactions Editor for SBGAS.

Reverend Prebendary Norman Wallwork is a Methodist minister in Gloucestershire and an Associate Tutor at Wesley College, Bristol. He was a major contributor to The Methodist Worship Book and is one of the group editing the new British Methodist hymn book. Along with the Abbot of Downside Norman is an ecumenical Canon of Wells Cathedral.