The
Transactions
of the
Sabine Baring-Gould
Appreciation Society
Volume 12 (2012)

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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 East Mersea, Essex, between 30 September – 2 October 2011.

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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.

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Introduction

The annual meeting of the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society in the autumn of 2011 was held on Mersea Island, Essex, where Sabine Baring-Gould lived for 10 years between 1871 and 1881. It is the setting for his most famous novel, *Mehalah*. This year’s Transactions feature four papers from the weekend.

**Roger Bristow** presented a summary of the people and places mentioned in the book, which he prefaced by talking about the time he spent working as a geologist in the area as a young man and how the discovery of Mehalah sparked his interest in Baring-Gould.

**Becky Smith** read a paper by **Troy White** based on his PhD thesis and called *Mehalah: a Gothic Novel*. In this he dissects and analyses the novel in a way that brings out a number of thought-provoking points, both about the style and structure of the book, and about what was going through Baring-Gould’s mind when he wrote it, at a challenging time in his life.

**David Nicholls** is the warden for Ray Island and has been involved in archaeological work there. He has also researched many aspects of local history to better understand the real people and places that influenced Baring-Gould when he wrote Mehalah. In his presentation, Ray Island and the legacy of Mehalah, he shared this local knowledge with us.

**David Shacklock** presented a summary of the books that Baring-Gould wrote while he was living at East Mersea as *Sabine’s Mersea Wordside*.

May I, once again, thank all the authors who have contributed to this issue. I hope that you will enjoy reading it.

Martin Graebe
March 2012

This publication is distributed to members annually as part of their membership entitlement. For information about the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society please visit the Societies website – www.sbgas.org.
Roger Bristow

In 1967, I was making a geological map of the Tollesbury area of Essex – the area I was mapping extended southwards to the Blackwater Estuary and eastwards towards Mersea Island. Whilst in the Tollesbury area, I acquired a copy of the Essex Countryside Magazine. In it, there was an article about a former local vicar of East Mersea called Sabine Baring-Gould who had written a novel with the funny name of Mehalah set in the marshes of this part of Essex. I thought ‘that sounds interesting, I will get a copy and read it.’ So, the following day I went into the nearby town of Maldon and for the princely sum of 2s 6d (12.5p) I acquired a cheap Collins edition of Mehalah – can you imagine doing that today?

In reading the story, I became fascinated by the wealth of accurate, local, topographical detail. I did not actually map Ray Island, but remember gazing at it fascinatedly from the west side of The Rhyn. The Old Hall Marshes, supposedly the location of the Red Hall, was a lonely, bleak spot, but nevertheless a lovely area to walk over (when not raining or windy) accompanied by the piping of the various wading birds. Some of the character names used in the novel were based on real people – Pudney (the farmer at ‘Smith’s Hall’) is one name that I clearly recall.

All this fired my enthusiasm for SB-G, but it was not for about 15 more years that I acquired my second Baring-Gould title – John Herring.

These notes, and the associated map, made with the help of David Nicholls, Brian Jay and the staff at the Mersea Museum, identify the large ‘cast’ of the book and the principle locations in which the action is set.

The Characters

**Bunting, Jabez**, storekeeper at Salcott

**Cutts, Mrs**, cleaner to the Rabbitt family

**Dowsing, Abraham**, Mehalah’s shepherd

**Goppin**, farmer at Virley

**Grout, Reuben**, innkeeper of the Rising Sun, Salcott

**Macpherson, Captain**. Captain of the coastguard

**Marriage** - 4 brothers and 3 sisters of this name who lived at Peldon

**Mead, Isaac**, owner of the Leather Bottle in the ‘City’
Mellonie, Mrs
Morrell, Jim, fisherman
Musset, Phoebe, pretty daughter of the owner of the grocery/drapery store in the ‘City’. A bit of a flirt. The surname is said to be a corruption of the Huguenot name ‘Moussett’.
Pettican, Admonition. Young wife of Charles with many male ‘cousins’
Pettican, Charles. Invalid cousin of Mrs de Witt (her mother’s brother’s son)
Pooley, Nathaniel, farmer
Pudney, Joshua, farmer of Smith’s Hall
Rabbitt, Reverend Edward. Curate at Virley with 14 children
Rebow, Elijah, cousin of George de Witt and antihero of the book. Lived at Red Hall
Sharland, Mehalah - heroine of the book. Often known as Gloriana or simply as Glory. Lived on The Ray. The name Mehalah is said to be a regular marshland name.
Sharland, Mrs Lydie (nee Vince) - Mehalah’s mother. Lydie Vince’s mother was a gypsy
Siggars, Widow
Sparks, Timothy - idle ‘cousin’ of Admonition Pettican
Tyll, Parson. Curate of the two parishes of Mersea (a non-resident rector on the grounds of ‘insalubrity’ of the spot).
Underwood, Susan, charwoman at Red Hall
Wise, a farmer who lived at Mersea
de Witt, George. Cousin of Elijah Rebow, and Mehalah’s acknowledged intended. The surname is supposedly a Huguenot name
de Witt, Mrs. George’s mother and aunt of Elijah Rebow (her mother was the sister of Elijah’s father)

Localities mentioned in the text (with map references):
Abberton. Village about 4 km north-west of Mersea [TM 005 190]
Abberton Hill
Abbot’s Hall Marsh [TL 977 137]. Saltings on the north side of Salcott Channel and about 1.5 km south of Great Wigborough.
Barrow Farm, near the Strood [TM 020 145].
Blue Anchor Inn, Wyvenhoe [=Wivenhoe c.TM 040 220].

Bradwell. Village about 6 km south of Mersea, across the Blackwater estuary [TM 005 070].

Bradwell chapel. St Peter’s Chapel on the edge of the marshes [TM 030 081].

Brightlingsea. Village on the opposite side of the Colne estuary to Mersea [TM 085 165]; church has a lofty tower.

Burnt Hill, a ‘red’ hill which SB-G places on the south side of Ray Island, but none has been found there. More likely, the red hill on the northern side of Mersea Island [TM 023 153], identified by David Nicholls, is the basis of this description (see Ch. 4). A red hill is described as “

large broad circular mounds of clay burnt to brick red, interspersed with particle of charcoal. A few fragments of bone are found in them, relics of the meals of those who raised these heaps, but they cover no urns, and enclose no cists, they contain no skeletons. The burnt or red hills are always situate at high-water mark; near them, below the surface of the vegetable deposits, are multitudes of oyster shells. Near them also are sometimes found, sunk in the marsh, polished chert weapons.”

Coastguard station on Mersea Hard – see Mersea Hard.

Decoy, set in a wood about 0.5 km south of Waldegraves Farm [TM 033 127].

“The decoy was a sheet of water covering perhaps an acre and a half in the midst of a wood. The clay that had been dug out for its construction had been heaped up, forming a little hill crowned by a group of willows. [. . .]The pond was fringed with rushes, except at the horns, where the nets and screens stood for trapping the birds.”

George de Witt came here with Phoebe Musset.

Devil’s Walls - at the top of Salcott Creek [TM 023 143]

Dog & Pheasant, East Mersea [TM 055 146].

[Old] Fountain Inn, East Road, West Mersea – next door to the Fox Inn. Now private houses (Alpine Cottages).

Fox Inn, East Road, West Mersea [TM 025 134] - next door to the former Old Fountain Inn

Grim’s Hoe, a Romano-British (1st Century) barrow on Mersea [TM 023 143]

“a great barrow with the Scotch pines on top. [. . .]It was a bell-shaped mound rising some thirty feet [actually 22.5ft] above the surface of the ground.”

Leather Bottle, Mersea. This was later renamed the Victory [TM 003 126].

Mersea City. A cluster of wooden houses and an inn (the Leather Bottle) on the west side of Mersea [TM 005 125].

Mersea Hard. At the mouth of the estuary – in the novel, a coastguard station was situated there [actually at TM 008 124].

Peldon. A hamlet about 3 km north-west of Mersea [TL 990 167].
Pyefleet, mouth of. Channel on the north side of Mersea [TM 065 161].

Ray. A small, low, island of London Clay rising out of the marshes between Mersea Island and the Rhyn. This was the home of Mehalah and her mother. The Ray was owned by Elijah Rebow who had bought it for £800. Sabine describes it as:

“[. . .] a hill of gravel rising from the heart of the marshes, crowned with ancient thorn-trees, and possessing, what is denied the mainland, and unfailing spring of purest water. At ebb, the Ray can only be reached from the old Roman Causeway called the Strood. [. . .] At the close of the last [18th] century there stood on the Ray a small farmhouse built of tarred wreckage timber, and roofed with red pantiles. The twisted thorn-trees about it afforded some, but slight, shelter. Under the little cliff of gravel was a good beach, termed a ‘hard’. [. . .] The one window at the side of the fireplace faced the west.”

Red Hall. Mythical home of Elijah Rebow set in the marshes 2 miles from Salcott, and near a windmill (see Chapter 4).

Mehalah and her mother climbed the wall and descended into the pastures. These were of considerable extent, reclaimed saltings, but of so old a date that the brine was gone from the soil, and they furnished the best feed for cattle anywhere round. Several stagnant canals or ditches intersected the flat tract and broke it into islands, but they hung together by the thread of sea-wall, and the windmill drained the ditches into the sea.

In the midst of the pasture stood a tall red-brick house. There was not a tree near it. It rose from the flat like a tower. The basement consisted of cellars above ground, and there were arched entrances to these from the two ends. They were lighted by two small round windows about four feet from the ground. A flight of brick stairs built over an arch led from a paved platform to the door of the house, which stood some six feet above the level of the marsh.

[. . .] The vaults beneath served partly as cellars, and being extensive, were employed with the connivance of the owner as a store-place for rum spirits. The house was indeed very conveniently situated for contraband trade. A “fleet” or tidal creek on either side of the marsh allowed of approach or escape by the one when the other was watched. Nor was this all. The marsh itself was penetrated by three or four ramifications of the two main channels, to these the sea-wall accommodated itself instead of striking across them, and there was water-way across the whole marsh, so that if a boat were lifted over the bank on one side, it could be rowed across, again lifted, and enter the other channel, before a pursuing boat would have time to return to and double the spit of land that divided the fleets. The windmill which stood on this spit was in no favour with the, coastguard, for it was thought to act the double purpose of pump and observatory.

The house was built completely of brick, the windows were of moulded brick, mullions and drip stone, and the roof was of tile. How the name of Red Hall came to be given it was obvious at a glance.

Round the house was a yard paved with brick, and a moat filled with rushes and weed. There were a few low outhouses, stable, cowsheds, bakehouse, forming a yard at the back, and into that descended the stair from the kitchen door over a flying arch, like that in front. Perhaps the principal impression produced by the aspect of Red Hall on the visitor was its solitariness. The horizon was bounded by sea-wall; only when the door was reached, which was on a level with the top of the mound, were the glittering expanse of sea, the
creeks, and the woods of Mersea Island and the mainland visible. [. . .] The utter
desolation of this tall gaunt house impressed them [i.e Mehalah and her mother]. The
thorn-trees at the Ray gave their farm an aspect of snugness compared with this. [. . .] but
so long as they were in the pasture near the Hall, nothing was to be seen save a flat tract
of grassland intersected with lines of bulrush and bounded by a mound.

Mehalah slowly ascended the stair, it was without a balustrade. The door was of strong
plank thickly covered with nails, and the date [1636] was made with nailheads at the top.
The room she stepped into was large and low. It was lighted by but one window to the
south, fitted with lead lattice. The floor was of brick, for the cellarage was vaulted and
supported a solid basement. There was no ceiling, and the oak rafters were black with age
and smoke. The only ornaments decorating the walls were guns and pistols, some of
curious foreign make.
The fireplace was large; on the oak lintel was cut deep the inscription: - WHEN I HOLD
(1636), I HOLD FAST.

**Red Lion**, Abberton [TM 007 190].

**Rhyn.** A creek between the Ray and the mainland [TM 003 147]. The Rose Inn,
Peldon, is at the head of the creek.

**Rising Sun Inn**, Salcott (now closed) [TL 950 136].

“At the end of the village stands a low tavern, the Rising Sun, a mass of gables; part of it,
the tavern drinking room is only one storey high, but the rest is a jumble of roofs and lean-
to buildings, chimneys and ovens, a miracle of picturesqueness.”

It was here that Mehalah came to find work
Rose Inn, Peldon [TM 007 159]. An old-fashioned inn with a vine spreading over the red-tiled roof and an ancient standard sign before the door, on the green, bearing a rose painted the size of a gigantic turnip. The pub was damaged in the 1884 earthquake.

Saint Osyth Priory, 5km E of Mersea Island [TM 122 157].

Salcott. Small village [TL 951 135] at the head of a Salcott Fleet. The chief landing place for smuggled goods. Separated from its neighbouring hamlet of Virley by a small tidal creek. The church is described as possessing: ‘[. . .] a handsome flint-built tower, but having no chancel.’

Salcott Fleet [TL 980 132]. Tidal channel extending from the Blackwater estuary to Salcott [TL 951 136].

Smith’s Hall [c.TM 022 139], home of Joshua Pudney ‘who loved his bottle and neglected his farm, who grew more thistles than wheat, and kept more hunters than cows.’ The present building replaces an older, more substantial, one, which may have formed the basis for the description of Red Hall.

Sunken Island [TL 994 125]. Situated ‘off’ Mersea, towards Salcott and Virley

Tiptree Heath [TL 885 145]. About 12 km west of Mersea, south-west of Tiptree.
“A permanent camping ground of gypsies, and squatters ran up their rude hovels; these were all engaged in the distribution of goods brought from the sea.”

Tollesbury Fleet [TL 980 115]. Tidal creek on the south side of Old Hall Marshes

Tollesbury Creek =Tollesbury Fleet?

Virley [TL 949 138]. Tiny hamlet with a ruined church close to Salcott. This is the church where Mehalah and Elijah were married. The church is described as:
“[. . .] a small hunchbacked edifice in the last stage of dilapidation, in a graveyard unhedged, unwalled; the church is scrambled over by ivy, with lattice windows bulged in by the violence of the gales, a bellcot leaning on one side like a drunkard. Near this decaying church is a gabled farm, and this and a cottage form Virley. [. . .] The churchyard and farmyard seemed all one. The pigs were rooting at the graves. A cow was lying in the porch. An old willow tree drooped over a stagnant pool beneath the chancel window. Shed roof tiles and willow leaves lay mouldering together on the edge of the pool. The church of timber and brick, put up anyhow on older stone foundations had warped and cracked; the windows leaned, fungus sprouted about the bases of the timbers. Every rib showed in the roof as on the side of a horse led to the knackers. [. . .] There was one bell. The dedication of Virley Church is unknown. Virley Church possessed one respectable feature, a massive chancel arch, but that gaped; and the pillars slouched back against the wall. [. . .] The Communion rail had rotted at the bottom [. . .] the floor in the midst, before the altar, had been eaten through by rats, emerging from an old grave, and exposed below gnawed and mouldy bones a foot beneath the boards. At some remote period the chancel of Virley had fallen, and had been rebuilt with timber and bricks on the old walls left to a height of two feet above the floor. As the old walls were four feet thick and the new
walls only the thickness of a brick, the chancel was provided by a low seat all around it, like the cancella of an ancient basilica.

**Waldegraves Farm**, Mersea Island [TM 033 132] - has a decoy pond

**[Great] Wigborough** [TL 969 150]. Hamlet about 5 km west of Mersea. The church [TL 968 157], which is situated on the crown of a hill, was used as a landmark by shipping. Buildings were damaged in the 1884 earthquake.

**Windmill** [TL 973 130]. A former pumping mill sited close to Red Hall. The base of the windmill has recently been discovered by Brian Jay and Don Rainbird.

**Wyvenhoe** [=Wivenhoe] [TM 040 215]. Village about 6 km north of Mersea. Charles Pettican lived on the outskirts of the village in:

“[. . .] a little compact wooden house painted white [. . .] The shutters were after the French fashion, external and painted emerald green. The roof was tiled and looked very red [. . .] Over the door of the house was a balcony with elaborate iron balustrades gilt; against these leaned two figureheads, females with very pink and white complexions, and no expression in their faces. There was a sanded path led from the gate to the door, there were two green patches of turf, one on each side of it. In the centre of that on the left was another figurehead – a Medusa.
Mehalah, a Gothic novel

Troy White (Abridged and read by Becky Smith on his behalf)

Those of you who were at the last two Gatherings will remember Troy White enlightening us as to the Gothic aspects of BG’s fiction, particularly in ‘Margery of Quether’. He explained how this involved the concept of threshold, or liminality, with characters suspended between two realities. The following has been extracted from his book-length thesis on the subject, with particular reference to ‘Mehalah’, and it magnificently explains why the book remains so popular to the present day and is likely to do so for many years to come. General readers might not be consciously aware of the underlying significance and associations in the story, but the timeless storyline of an epic struggle, and agonising dilemmas will appeal to us as long as storytelling exists.

I have kept almost entirely to Troy’s own words, but have reduced them to what I hope is a coherent essence. I have been forced to leave out all the material concerning Baring-Gould’s ‘Origin and Development of Religious Belief’, which he sees as crucial to an analysis of Mehalah. I have also omitted almost all the links Troy makes with the French Revolution, and the extended comparison of this novel with ‘Wuthering Heights’. This does the piece a great disservice. What follows here is a ruthlessly filleted version, showing you some of the choice morsels of meat, but almost nothing of the skeleton that forms the structure of the thesis.

The mind of the writer, so sensitive to the subtleties of place, was saturated in the strange marshland of the Mersea Island region. For ten years, his Rectory windows framed a strikingly alien and uncongenial land seemingly oblivious to the advances of civilization; for ten years, thoughts on the setting and its people were jumbled up with Catholic theological musings and religious service.

Baring-Gould saw the Mersea region in his day as anachronistic, an untouched corner of England seemingly cut off from modern developments. Some things had changed since the time of the (French) Revolution, like a diminution of the smuggling trade, but much seemed stuck in the past. The place was to Baring-Gould a bridge through time, so that Mehalah’s plight could have been of the 1880s as much as of the 1790s. In this way Mersea could readily connect French-Revolution-era Britain with Victorian Britain.

Baring-Gould is not recognized for his contributions to the philosophy of the second wave of the Oxford Movement; nor is Mehalah and his body of fiction recognized as a contribution to the literature of the Oxford Movement. These neglected contributions are linked, as Mehalah can be identified not only with Tractarianism, but with a particular development within the second wave of the Oxford Movement as developed by Baring-Gould and others and taken up in Lux Mundi. The first-generation Oxford Movement looked to the past in order to emulate the true Church. This interest in the past was not lost in the Oxford Movement’s second wave, but
there was also a philosophical development towards conciliating the past and modernity within Catholic dogma. In this way the second wave is relatable to Gothic fiction, which draws together the ancient and modern in the unity of the Gothic text.

*Mehalah* is a Gothic Tractarian novel that responds to the philosophical attempt of the second wave to address modern anxieties, and particularly those felt by Baring-Gould, by wrestling with the tensions between ancient and modern ways of thinking.

Set around eighty years before Baring-Gould took up residence in Mersea, *Mehalah* opens by laying out an atmosphere ripe for Gothic happenings:

“Between the mouths of the Blackwater and the Colne, on the east coast of Essex, lies an extensively marshy tract veined and freckled in every part with water. It is a wide waste of debatable ground contested by sea and land, subject to incessant incursions from the former, but stubbornly maintained by the latter. [...] The creeks, some of considerable length and breadth, extend many miles inland, and are arteries whence branches out a fibrous tissue of smaller channels, flushed with water twice in the twenty-four hours. At noon-tides, and especially at the equinoxes, the sea asserts its royalty over this vast region, and overflows the whole, leaving standing out of the flood only the long island of Mersea, and the lesser islet, called the Ray. [...] A more desolate region can scarce be conceived, and yet it is not without beauty.”

This “debatable” landscape, contemplated for years by a parson with a fervent interest in the eerie, the Catholic Church, and Hegelianism, is in *Mehalah* presented as an unstable Gothic threshold, charged with dialectical significance.

The setting is a direct reflection of its people. The narrator neatly divides the marshland population into a people strongly associated with the land and a people strongly associated with the sea. The sea-people are the wild-blooded, turbulent fishermen and smugglers who “swarm” on the shores and live in “the tarred wreck-timber cabins by the sea just above the reach of the tide”. They are the “leavened” ones, the “mixed-breeds”—descendents of gypsies and foreign smugglers who intermarried with the indigene. Their roving ancestors found on the marshland coast an alluring “life of adventure, danger, and impermanence”.

In clear opposition to these colonists are the unchanging inland peasants who remain unaltered, stamped out of the old unleavened dough of Saxon stolidity, forming a class apart from that of the farmers and that of the seamen, in intelligence, temperament, and gravitation.

On the Ray, within a small farmhouse, Elijah Rebow and Mehalah Sharland (nicknamed Glory) face each other from across the room, locked in an opposition of wills:

“He leaned on his duck-gun, and glared from under his pent-house brows and thatch of black hair over the head of the old woman at a girl who stood behind, leaning on the back of her mother’s chair, and who returned his stare with a look of defiance from her brown eyes”.

They are a striking pair of combatants: he an intelligent yet cruel and unscrupulous middle-aged farmer (and smuggler) of considerable wealth and influence; she an unrefined, uneducated, yet noble young woman dressed in her usual, second-hand sailor’s outfit of a blue Guernsey sweater and red cap. Both Elijah and Mehalah are
full of fight, with fiery passions animating their expressions, particularly in contrast with Mehalah’s invalid mother seated between them.

She has given her love rather to Elijah’s cousin and opposite, the light-hearted, blonde, dashing young sailor George De Witt, with whom she associates freedom.

An indication of Mehalah’s free nature is her signature red cap, the *bonnet rouge* or Phrygian cap, associated by the Romans with the freed slave and later taken up by French revolutionaries as a symbol of the possession and pursuit of freedom. Mehalah’s symbolic cap connects her to the French Revolution which, at the time of the story, had only recently begun across the Channel. Before the events of the story, George “had given her in jest a picture of the Goddess of Liberty as proclaimed in Paris, wearing the *bonnet rouge*” equating Mehalah with the very embodiment of liberty.

Despite Mehalah’s strong association with freedom, she is not merely a symbol of freedom. Rather, she is more equivalent to the ambivalent setting in its entirety; the first words of *Mehalah* establish an ambivalence of setting, and we soon find an echoing ambivalence in the character of Mehalah. The novel treats names with much attention and significance, and Mehalah is called by two names; one corresponding to the land, the other to the water. Her “land” name, Mehalah (“A regular Essex marshland name”), is a feminine variation of the name Mahalah briefly mentioned in 1 Chronicles 7:18, which means tenderness, barrenness, or sickness. Mehalah’s nickname, Glory, is what the “sailor and fisher fellows like to call her”; it derives from the ship-name “Gloriana” (a name given to Elizabeth I), which is embroidered on her Guernsey sweater. Like the sweater, the name Glory is a second-hand acquirement, nonetheless fitting because of Mehalah’s queen-like strength and beauty. The word “glory” also has Old Testament connotations, a general meaning of brightness, splendor, triumph, and majesty, and “glory” is used to describe the visible aura of God and heaven.

In *Mehalah*, sexuality and spirituality are always linked. Elijah’s expressions of craving for Mehalah certainly have a religious tone. Mehalah’s spiritual longing is pragmatically joined with her desire for love; she hopes that George, to whom she is secretly betrothed, will unlock the mystery of marriage—a spiritual union which will lead her to a transcendence of greater freedom:

“The thought of life with him filled her with exultation. She could leap up, like the whooper swan, spread her silver wings, and shout her song of rapture and of defiance, like a trumpet. He would open to her the gates into that mysterious world into which she now only peeped, he would solve for her the perplexities of her troubled soul, he would lead her to the light which would illumine her eager mind.”

Mehalah believes that marriage with George will somehow illumine the way into a “mysterious world” of expansive freedom. It is soon made clear to the reader that Mehalah has made George into far more than he deserves.

Disparaging depictions of the “light,” modern side of the threshold can be found in George and Phoebe. Contrasted with the dark-haired Elijah and Mehalah, these blonde, flippant characters seem less rural and immersed in the past—and less
immersed in the gravity of the novel. In certain instances George is made to be particularly modern. He reveals one association with the modernity in his gift of the “Liberty” illustration to Mehalah. Furthermore, George displays what Baring-Gould would consider a dismissive modern cynicism towards the supernatural when Mehalah gives him her family’s magical medallion and explains its magical properties.

Each of the three main characters has a home which is, as a variation on the opening setting, some type of threshold of land and water. Mehalah lives on her island above the overflowing marsh. Elijah rules at Red Hall, a tall, lonely manor surrounded by reclaimed salttings within a sea-wall. And George lives with his mother on the Pandora, an old collier (cargo ship) that his father drove on the hard (a solid beach) and “dismasted.” The grounded ship at times sits on dry land, at times is surrounded by the tide.

Though Elijah dismisses George along with the rest of Mersea, calling him a “clown without a soul”, George is presented as having a sort of threshold self. George’s mother, who is Elijah’s aunt, calls him “a glass of half and half, rum and water,” because he has the blood of her fiery, wealthy Rebow clan watered down with the blood of his father, a “low chap”.

Early in the novel, George stands on the deck of the Pandora with Mehalah and young Phoebe, the scheming, petty, golden-haired village belle. In this scene, George is shown as on a threshold, placed in a position to choose. George and Mehalah are known as a couple, but the unscrupulous Phoebe is eager to steal him away. George is positioned (like Mehalah) as if at a threshold between two very different choices:

“The two girls stood side by side. The contrast between them was striking, and the young man noticed it. Mehalah was tall, lithe, and firm as a young pine, erect in her bearing, with every muscle well developed [...] Her navy-blue jersey and skirt, the scarlet of her cap and kerchief, and of a petticoat that appeared below the skirt, made her a rich combination of colour, suitable to a sunny clime rather than to the misty bleak east coast. Phoebe was colourless beside her, a faded picture, faint in outline. Her complexion was delicate as the rose, her frame slender, her contour undulating and weak. She was the pattern of a trim English village maiden, with the beauty of youth, and the sweetness of ripening womanhood, sans sense, sans passion, sans character, sans everything—pretty vacuity. “

Most of the characters in Mehalah are stagnant boors, complacently land-locked. Unlike Elijah and Mehalah (and, potentially, George), they have smothered any yearning for expansion beyond the given dimensions of self.

Yet negation, not boorishness, is the fundamental sin which leads to a hell like Grims Hoe. Mehalah and Elijah are driven beyond the given in pursuit of a far distant ideal (thus they are true souls according to Elijah). They are a more complex, “spiritual” form of the antagonistic setting and populace. They negate, from opposite vantages, subverting their own spiritual intentions.

With his Calvinist leanings, Elijah is impatient of free-will and champions restriction. While his mind may be fired with thoughts of the universal, he tends to
comprehend this universal only in terms of its overwhelming unity. He is not disposed to consider human existence as significant in its present, intermediate stage, but rather from the vantage point of some infinitely projected past or future in which change is no more, all is concluded, and every part has its place in an all-encompassing unit. Elijah does not attempt to win Mehalah through anything like courting; rather he demands their union as a preordained fact.

Mehalah will not operate from the “completed” perspective of Elijah. Quite the opposite, she is a searcher who wonders at the mysteries she experiences, including the strange ideas which Elijah presents to her (Elijah does not seem to wonder over anything). While Elijah holds fast to universal conclusions, Mehalah, with her characteristic freedom, is drawn to immediate experience and the pursuit of the ever-distant horizon.

Elijah and Mehalah are each motivated by a fiery, spiritually tinged passion. Elijah’s pursuit of Mehalah is driven by his conception of their fated conclusion of infinitely encompassing, universal unity; Mehalah’s escape from Elijah is driven by her vague discernment of an expansive movement towards the infinite. Elijah is deductive, beginning from his ideal conclusions and drawing the present reality towards it, while Mehalah is inductive, working through her experience towards a mysterious, vague ideal. In this way Mehalah is like the traditional Gothic Romance heroine and Elijah the traditional Gothic villain: she works through uncertainty and frightening possibilities while he operates from an entrenched—and to her perspective, mysterious—position of authority and knowledge.

One night Elijah tells Mehalah a local legend concerning Grim’s Hoe, an earth mound on Mersea Island across from the Ray. According to the legend, Grims Hoe is reputed to cover an ancient Viking ship-burial, and within the hull of the ship are entombed twin warrior brothers. These brothers “loved one another; they were twins, born the same hour, and they had but one heart and soul; what one willed that willed the other, what one desired that the other desired also”. This shared will became paradoxically conflicted when both brothers fell in love with the same woman. They fought and killed each other to have her, and were then buried with their armour and swords in their ship. The maiden was buried alive between their corpses.

Ever since the burial, these twin brothers are slowly resurrected throughout the moon’s cycle, so that at each full moon their reconstituted corpses battle again for the woman who lives on and watches in horror. The three will live in this tortured existence until one brother can kill the other and claim the woman, though the fight can never end because the twins are completely equal in every way.

When Mehalah asks Elijah why he has told her this story, he answers that the story relates to the two of them. He says that they, like the ghostly twins, are fated to love and hate throughout their own vicious struggle. Mehalah tells Elijah that she feels no love and only abhorrence for him, yet inwardly she cannot deny that she senses a mysterious and fated connection:
“That he was drawn towards her by some attractive power exercised against her will, she knew full well, but she would not allow that he exercised the least attraction on her. Yet she did feel that there was some sort of spell upon her. Hate him as she did and would, she knew that she could not altogether escape him, she had an instinctive consciousness that she was held by him, she did not understand how, in his hands.”

Mehalah also senses that her connection with Elijah does relate in some way to Grims Hoe, and the story he told begins to dominate her thoughts. Elijah had said that the subterranean warriors could be heard when battling. Mehalah decides to go and test for herself the truth of this:

“Was the story true? Could anyone hear the warriors shout and smite, who chose to listen at the full of the moon? The distance to Grim’s Hoe was not over two miles. Mehalah thought she must go there and listen with her own ears. She would go.”

For Mehalah, the transcendentally supernatural yet eternally repeated Grims Hoe battle suggests an “Otherworld” outside of her experience which is nonetheless integrally connected with her own struggles with Elijah.

Intoxicated by wild thoughts of Grims Hoe, Mehalah’s journey involves a confused mixture of the real and the fantastic. Stepping outside, she is startled by her own shadow and laughs at her nervousness. Upon reaching Grims Hoe, she climbs the barrow and places her head on the earth. Listening intently for the supernatural combat, she is alerted and momentarily confused by sounds she must discern as either natural or supernatural—a fir cone falls, a stoat runs into its hole, an attacked rabbit lets out a dying scream. Mehalah lifts her head up and lays it down again, attempting to hear beyond these physical distractions—counterfeit sounds in relation to the supernatural she strains to hear. A culminating clash of the real and the fantastic occurs as her ear is pressed to Grims Hoe: straining for sounds of subterranean battle, her eye catches the illumination of fire in the distance. She starts up in terror as she realizes that her own home, with her mother locked inside, burns in the distance. That Mehalah should be listening for proof of Grims Hoe when she discovers her home ablaze is a quite suggestive interweaving of investigation and discovery.

Because of the recent, unprecedented theft of some of her sheep, Mehalah had only earlier that night, for the first time, installed a lock in the door of her home as protection against criminals. (Elijah is of course responsible for the theft, in another attempt to impoverish Mehalah and drive her to him.)

As she races home, self-recrimination whirls through her mind: “O God! what had she done? Why had she gone? Had not the spilled spirits caught fire and set the house in flames? Why had she locked her mother in? a thing never done before” Indeed, why had she gone? She went to explore the Grims Hoe mystery and that exploration has led to a single, terrifying paradox applicable both to the “real” world and that of the Hoe—the two worlds juxtaposed in Mehalah’s listening to the ground and seeing the flame. In that moment the otherworldly terror of Grims Hoe is channeled into the immediate terror of her familiar home burning, “the dead Danish warriors forgotten in the agony of her fear”. The burning home—on another
“mound” of earth across from Grims Hoe—is presented as an “answer” to her supernatural investigation because of the sudden reversal to the “real” at the climatic point of that investigation.

This paradox, applicable to Grims Hoe and her home, is that of the dual-faced, threshold perspective. The locked door is a literal threshold which is presented as paradoxical—a common item in Gothic fiction. Mehalah locked the front door to keep out criminals, but ends up locking her sleeping mother inside the burning house. The restriction of thieves becomes the restriction of her mother; the thieves’ freedom to enter would also be her mother’s freedom to exit. A door, as a passage and barrier, is a threshold of both freedom and restriction for her and her enemies; protection becomes endangerment, while exposure would allow escape. Furthermore Mehalah had cast down the alcohol in order to save her mother, and now she believes that this act has started the fire that now threatens to kill her.

Grims Hoe likewise contains an antinomy within a central truth which is both divided and united by the threshold perspective. On the burial mound, Mehalah imagines herself on a threshold, while on each side a twin brother fights the other, identical to his twin except for perspective. The twins are “one,” opposed in their shared will. At the moment of “revelation” on Grims Hoe, Mehalah develops a dual perspective which splits her abstractly on either side of a literal threshold: her earlier protective intentions with the lock and her later agony over her use of it positions her as a single being both outside and inside the house—at a threshold between the two, uniting them into a single paradoxical truth concerning the lock. At this point Mehalah races to fight against her earlier action of locking the door, as if in battle with herself. At this point of revelation she experiences herself as a singular being turned against herself. Thus Mehalah’s investigation of Grims Hoe leads to a seemingly unrelated discovery which is nonetheless connected.

To Mehalah’s mediating perspective, a single truth can be simultaneously one thing and its opposite, a duality contained within a single thing. Such a perspective is highlighted on the Gothic threshold, which inspires a paradoxical and uneasy tension as opposites both starkly separate and strangely coincide. Elijah’s argument is that Mehalah relates to the Grims Hoe conflict because she also has a “double” in him and that they are truly “one” even in their intense opposition.

Mehalah reaches her home only to discover that Elijah has saved her mother. (Elijah is certainly a “paradoxical” hero-villain; he saves Mehalah’s mother and earns Mehalah’s grudging thanks, but he also set the house on fire.) With her mother in ill health and with no other options, a bewildered Mehalah is forced to accept the invitation of Elijah to board at Red Hall. Upon arriving there, Elijah celebrates the triumph of his prophecy: “Welcome, Glory! welcome to Red Hall! The New Year sees you under the roof where you shall rule as mistress; your destiny is mightier than your will”

Red Hall—a tower-like, moated, red-brick structure—dominates in striking isolation over a remarkably level field lined with drainage canals and surrounded by a sea-wall. The sea-wall was built to hold back the “incessant incursions” of water
described in the book’s introduction (presumably by Elijah’s Huguenot ancestors). Furthermore, excess water is collected in the canals and ejected by the windmill pump into the sea. The estate is a reclaimed salting—that is, “contested” marshland transformed into stable, profitable farmland. Red Hall is, appropriately, a triumph of restriction of land over the freedom of water.

Red Hall is eerie and castle-like, a decidedly Gothic stronghold, marked above the entrance with “1636” and over the fireplace with the family motto, “WHEN I HOLD (1636) I HOLD FAST” This pairing of the motto and ancient date depicts the claustrophobic restrictiveness of the past in Gothic fiction. The restrictiveness of the Gothic involves the fixity of the past which cannot be undone, the indelible sins of the father being visited upon descendants as a sort of predetermined fate.

The final flourish of Gothic detail is Elijah’s mad older brother, who is locked in a dungeon on the ground floor. The Gothic atmosphere, relentless owner, and madman living below make Red Hall a strange new home for Mehalah.

Elijah explains his mad brother to Mehalah in his typically brusque manner: “Been mad from a child. A good job for me, as he was the elder. Now I have him in keeping, and the land and the house and the money are mine. What I hold, I hold fast. Amen”. Baring-Gould certainly had a personal connection to this part of his story about a mad brother and inheritance. Baring-Gould’s struggle over inheritance with his father was settled when his brother had a mental breakdown. William never worked again, and was soon locked up because of his mad frenzies. Because of his brother’s state, Baring-Gould was allowed to inherit both roles of squire and parson—a “good job” for him, though he doubtless did not share Elijah’s exact sentiment.

The morning after Mehalah and her Mother board at Red Hall, Elijah speaks with his inflexible presumption, declaring to Abraham, the elderly worker on Mehalah’s farm, that he would now work for him as master and Mehalah as mistress of the Ray and Red Hall jointly. A leering Abraham then says to Mehalah, “When are you going to church? Eh, mistress? I thought it was coming to this.” Mehalah, enraged, follows after Elijah to upbraid him and assert her independence from him. In her agitated state she almost tumbles through the opened trap door. She steadies herself and becomes privy to a bizarre scene playing out below:

“Faugh! an odor rose from the cellar as from the lair of a wild beast. She looked in, there was the maniac racing up and down in the den fastened by his chain, jabbering and uttering incoherent cries. He was almost naked, covered with filthy rags, and his hair hung over his face so that she could distinguish no features by the dim light that strayed down from the trap, and from the horn lanthorn that Elijah had placed on the steps. Rebow had a pitchfork, and he was tossing fresh straw to his brother, and raking out the sodden and crushed litter of the wretched man.”

What a strange tableau for Mehalah as she searches for the meaning and realization of freedom. Elijah faithfully tends to his brother (whose name is never given), allowing no help from his servants, performing the menial tasks himself. Nonetheless, he treats his brother savagely, often employing a cruel whip to punish
him. This awkward, degrading relationship provokes a strange awe in Mehalah, particularly, I assume, because this view of Elijah contrasts with his normally assured and dominating demeanor. Elijah comes more clearly into focus as a complex character throughout the novel, with his own motivations and personal difficulties. We might wonder if Elijah’s care for his brother, despite his cruelty, might suggest a concealed tenderness in him. Mehalah is disarmed by the sight of the brothers, losing any desire to confront Elijah. She leaves the house and sees Elijah rake debris and waste out the ground door of his brother’s dungeon. The scene is almost tender, considering the two involved: “He did not notice her, or he pretended not to do so, and she shrank back”

Mehalah and Elijah are each bound by an exasperating bond to a dependent family member. Furthermore, each dependent family member is made wretched and dependent by a prevalence of either freedom or restriction. Mehalah is essentially chained to her land-bound, petty, and sickly mother. She is unable to move beyond the borders of Mersea with her mother in tow. Elijah notes this when speaking to Mehalah’s mother in the opening scene at the Ray: “Why, but for you sitting there, sweating and jabbering, Glory would not be bound to this lone islet, but would go out and see the world, and taste life. She grows here like a mushroom, she does not live” The mother is stationary—difficult to transport because of her sickness, and later pleased to be “imprisoned” within the confines of Red Hall.

Conversely, Elijah’s brother must be diligently contained in Red Hall; he is always attempting to escape. Elijah says that he must “keep him short of food, and strap his shoulders, or he would tear the walls down in his fury”

Elijah’s relationship with his brother provides a similar reminder to Mehalah’s, showing that Elijah, in his own day-to-day existence apart from Mehalah, fights in a personal, familial, and life-long battle between restriction and freedom. The constant incarceration of Elijah’s brother is the core of Elijah’s general obsession with control.

The mad brother is kept in a ground-floor cellar, built as a safeguard against flooding, while a flight of brick stairs leads to the elevated front door. Elijah accesses the dungeon through a trap-door which is located under the leather armchair on which he broods. The brother can easily be seen as an extension of Elijah’s self because of Elijah’s borderline insanity and later declension into madness, because the brother is never named or clearly seen, and because the brothers live in parallel sections of Red Hall. Elijah sits in his armchair over his imprisoned brother, a relatively normal living space paralleled by a madman’s dungeon below. Elijah’s incessant pacing back and forth reminds Mehalah of the “mad brother pacing in the vault below” This layering of Red Hall also matches Elijah’s incongruous facial features, in which his refined upper face stands above his large and animalistic jaw. Red Hall is then a picture of Elijah, with his brother relating to the “free” part of his own threshold nature which he dominates and imprisons. (In this correspondence between villain and his Gothic home we find yet another reworked trope of traditional Gothic fiction.)
Mehalah and Elijah’s burdensome relatives could then be considered as an external manifestation of a part of their dual nature, the despised side of the threshold (opposite to Mehalah’s use of George). Yet the person, being family, cannot be neglected (Mehalah tells her mother, “I never, never will desert you. Whatever happens, our lot shall be cast together”). Mehalah and Elijah understandably despise and fear, and thus negate, the part of their own self embodied by their dependent. Mehalah would like to escape the state represented by her mother—the “land” side of her own threshold self—to push away from limitedness of her self. She does not want to be like her mother, and she revolts against the restriction she senses in her self: her “spirit—that infinite essence so mysteriously enclosed within bounds, in strange contradiction to its nature” strains against limit.

Perhaps Elijah fears losing control like his brother. Elijah understands freedom as leading to madness, which has become a burden in his life and a disgrace for his brother. He wants to restrict the wild freedom linked with his brother, and his belief in fate gives a proscribed structure and purpose to his world.

What we have then is an overlapping of characters in which the dependent is connected to the self and the opposite other. Elijah has reason to consider freedom to be degenerating and restriction elevating, while Mehalah believes the opposite, and they each have kin who seem to validate their contradictory inclinations. Elijah and Mehalah are joined not only by some inscrutable destiny as suggested by Elijah, but by a familial, dissipated version of the other.

How might these overlapping characters, based on the conflict of Mehalah and Elijah, relate to Mehalah’s experience of paradoxes in Grims Hoe and the locked door of her burning house? In the paradoxes a single thing or act is reversed against itself. Elijah and Mehalah can be understood as Grims Hoe “doubles” on the Gothic threshold. They are both presented as “threshold” characters between restriction and freedom, and their joined desires and fears as such create a “Janus-face” experience for the reader.

DeLaMotte states that the Gothic world is dominated by such experiences, as encapsulated in the Gothic fear: “the fear of terrible separateness and the fear of unity with some terrible Other” In Mehalah, a double-sided fear and desire is expressed concerning human freedom and restriction: the fear of instability is matched by a fear of restriction, while a desire for developments is matched by a desire for stability. Elijah fears losing control through freedom while Mehalah fears losing control through restriction. In this way the novel explores ideas important to the Gothic traditions ambivalence towards ancient tradition and modern innovation.

Red Hall, with its even greater isolation and enclosing wall which blocks the outside world from view, has an atmosphere of restriction. Elijah developed his ideas here. Now Mehalah must work on the riddle of her development within the structure of Red Hall—she is still working with land and sea, just a different arrangement of them.
Two more dissimilar characters than Mehalah and Mrs. De Witt (George’s mother and Elijah’s sister) could hardly be imagined, yet Mrs. De Witt, growing up at Red Hall, desired freedom as Mehalah now does:

Red Hall was, after all, her [Mrs. De Witt’s] home; its marshes were the first landscape on which her eyes had opened, its daisies had been her first necklaces, its bulrushes her first whips, its sea-wall the boundary of her childish world. It was a yearning for a wider, less level world, which had driven her in a rash moment into the arms of Moses De Witt.

Mehalah, like Mrs. De Witt, sought to fulfill her yearning for freedom in marriage. The picture of a young Miss Rebow chasing after expansion contrasts with her older, silly, self-satisfied state, and this difference suggests the possibility of Mehalah’s path towards freedom ending in stagnant failure—someone with grand aspirations can nonetheless go wrong. Like Miss Rebow, Mehalah continues at Red Hall her yearning for a wider world.

Standing at Red Hall’s front door atop the staircase, one can view the sea and surrounding countryside. On the field, however, surrounded by the obstructive sea-wall, nothing can be seen save the world of Red Hall. In this way Red Hall is buried like Grims Hoe, cut off from the expansiveness as symbolically invested by Mehalah in the sea horizon. In a deflated mood after witnessing Elijah toil in his brother’s lair, Mehalah searches for a spot away from her mother and Elijah to consider how she might escape from Red Hall. She walks the field and ascends the sea-wall, gaining a view of the sea. The sea-wall is a literal threshold between land and sea. It becomes the point where Mehalah hereafter returns to contemplate her literal and abstract freedom. "Red Hall and its marshes were to her a prison, and freedom was beyond its sea-wall" Mehalah of course prefers open spaces as on the Ray. From the vantage point of the sea-wall, between the restriction of Red Hall and the freedom of the open sea, She gazes upon the horizon, which becomes for her a picture for development towards the infinite.

She looks for a passing ship as a sign of her eventual freedom, and she instead sees a permanently stationary ship projecting an endless cycle of light and dark. The sea, associated with freedom and escape, is convoluted by a reminder of the land-locked ship of Grims Hoe, an idea opposite to the free ocean.

Mehalah’s experience at the sea-wall is a further layering and intensification of the opening setting, bringing to mind all of the amazingly diverse arrangements of setting in the novel’s first half, and the considerable time spent unfolding these arrangements for the reader. The threshold setting has been remade over and over: in the locals; in the conflict of the main characters, their internal thresholds, and their dependent family members; in the homes of the Ray, Red Hall, and the Pandora; and in the Grims Hoe choice. The conceptual threshold of the novel’s central conflict between freedom and restriction is carried through and presented differently in each of these arrangements.
A chief strength of the novel is a complex seamless blending of philosophy with the Gothic threshold, providing “contested” spaces within which the characters, who are integrally involved in this setting, move, act, and battle.

At the end of the novel George is fulfilling his previously defined role as a facilitator towards freedom. As she earlier desired, he offers to help Mehalah in escaping Mersea—a provincial, backwards, stagnant, and difficult place. Mehalah now, however, after all that she has been through, is unable to allow him that role. She feels that something would be incomplete in this abandonment of the past—that she would be miserable because for her the past could not be forgotten.

Elijah’s sermons form a substantial part of the novel’s second half. They consistently connect his dialectical philosophy with his desire for union with Mehalah. These sermons suggest that Baring-Gould was aware of the role his philosophy took in the shaping of Mehalah. Regardless, these weathered, countrified pieces of philosophy grant his novel a considerable depth of thought and feeling, drawing as they do from Baring-Gould’s own passionately held beliefs.

I would consider the relentless, hypnotic sermons of Elijah to be the most powerful part of Mehalah, and perhaps superior to anything similar—including the speeches by Heathcliff and Catherine in Wuthering Heights. The sermons emerge organically from the plot and are bolstered by their context. One can almost hear the crescendos of Elijah’s strong yet straining voice as he attempts to relate his deeply held beliefs to Mehalah. Coming from the villain, the sermons have a frighteningly seductive charm—and a thrilling immediacy as Elijah stands before and at times actually takes hold of Mehalah.

For Elijah, God is not right- or left-handed, but rather ambidextrous, creating with each hand balanced parts out of his unity, so that they are simultaneously distinct and unified (God does not specialize). Like Baring-Gould, Elijah takes this dialectical structure to be the explanation of the workings of all things. For instance, Elijah explains, a man who joins with someone who isn’t his true double will not be happy.

Mehalah has a consistently gloomy tone; its tragic conclusion remains nonetheless surprising. The author took up the complicated task of revealing the villain Elijah as a better match for Mehalah than the hero George—only for Elijah then to murder her. The deep tragedy of the novel is that just as Mehalah is turning to Elijah (as he predicted), he feels the need to force their unity in a macabre parody of marriage in which he and Mehalah are wrapped in chains and joined in death.

The reader, like Mehalah, becomes entranced in the taut drawing together of a true marriage of opposites, and feels the tragedy of its disruption, both when George arrives and then more definitively at the ending. The reader has been purposefully led to desire a union between Elijah and Mehalah (or at any rate see it as the best conclusion). In desiring this marriage, we are led to share, at least in this respect, the sentiment of Baring-Gould for prizeing conciliation of opposites.
So - Why did Baring-Gould write an ending that seemingly contradicts the novel’s most delicately handled dynamic in making a hero of its villain? Mehalah is a character whom Baring-Gould obviously admires, so for what reason does he fashion her murder?

I would relate this ambivalent resemblance and contrast to the idea that *Mehalah* presents Baring-Gould’s ambivalent consideration of Mersea as both with and without his influence—that is, abiding both Baring-Gould’s “absence” and his “presence” on Mersea. As I will explain, this ambivalence resulted from Baring-Gould’s hopes, frustrations, and sorely felt failures related to his Mersea ministry.

As I have discussed in the previous section, the dismal Church and people in *Mehalah* illustrate what Baring-Gould would consider the absence of a Tractarian presence. *Mehalah* is set at a time before Baring-Gould’s Tractarian influence arrived in East Mersea. Perhaps Baring-Gould considered the spiritually searching rural person of the late eighteenth century, embodied in Mehalah, to need the influence of someone like himself, a thoughtful Tractarian with an expansive theory, unlike a weak Parson Rabbit and a distant Parson Tyll (based as he was on Baring-Gould’s predecessor). Mehalah has a strong spiritual longing, but no spiritual guidance or assistance.

Baring-Gould did not have the happiest ten years as parson of East Mersea. His ministry was not as effective as it was in Yorkshire and would be afterward at Lew Trenchard. Besides the uncongenial nature of the place and people, his anticipation of one day appointing himself to the living of Lew Trenchard to be both parson and squire made it difficult for him to settle in Mersea and overcome his discontent.

Elijah in part suggests the “presence” of Baring-Gould in his novel. Like Baring-Gould, Elijah is an unusual, passionate man. Perhaps Elijah, in some of his qualities, is how Baring-Gould assumed himself to appear to the rural communities of Horbury, Dalton, and Mersea—or, considering the relationship of Elijah and Mehalah, how he might have first appeared to the mill girl whom he would eventually marry. Baring-Gould could be an intimidating presence, partly by virtue of a stubborn, strongly opinionated, and domineering manner. Like Elijah, Baring-Gould spoke of a strange, dialectical philosophy. In opposition to the clergymen of the novel, Elijah provides Mehalah with a spiritual “education” that shocks her by speaking to her grand, transcendent aspirations. Baring-Gould had his own ancient home and land that he knew would amaze his wife Grace, as Mehalah is awed by Elijah’s Red Hall.

Perhaps a frustrated Baring-Gould vicariously “kills” his East Mersea congregation via the character of Mehalah, all while acknowledging—perhaps in embittered hopefulness—that she does seek transcendence and eventually does begin to turn towards conciliation. While Mehalah does seek some sort of spiritual ideal, she pursues it in the form of worthless George. Elijah’s frustration with Mehalah’s idealization of George seems very similar to a parson’s frustration over a resistant congregation, and particularly over those who display promise yet don’t live up to it. Baring-Gould argues in *Origin* all people have an internal “Revelation” which
directs them to strive for the infinite, but that most becomes distracted and misguided. The searching Mehalah could then represent spiritual seekers generally.

This, as I said, is an outrageously abbreviated glimpse of Troy’s thesis, which earned him his Doctorate. I hope it has convinced you that BG was a novelist of considerable depth and ability, and that the popularity of this novel, up to the present day, is amply justified by its quality and importance as shown to us by Troy.
RAY ISLAND AND THE LEGACY OF MEHALAH

David Nicholls

David Nicholls’ presentation was not scripted. He has, however, provided a copy of this paper, which was the basis for the talk he gave in 2010 to a meeting of the Mersea Museum Society.

In 1970, the National Trust bought Ray Island after a group of local people led by Alec Grant persuaded them to make their first property purchase of any kind on the Essex coast. The group wanted to prevent inappropriate and unwelcome development, as the owner at the time, a Colchester businessman, had obtained outline permission to build two bungalows on the Ray.

The island occupies a unique place in the popular local imagination. Since Victorian times it has been used as a public picnicking area in the warmer months, and in winter, wildfowlers shot ducks in the surrounding salt marshes while others bagged rabbits on the island itself. All this would have ceased if the Ray had been developed under private ownership, but there was another reason why the National Trust was persuaded to buy it. The principal and most romantic consideration was the island's association with Mehalah, the dark and tragic novel written by the Reverend Sabine
Baring-Gould, rector of East Mersea between 1871 and 1881. Its link with a highly acclaimed novel by an eminent Victorian clergyman is what ultimately saved Ray Island for the enjoyment of the general public.

Baring Gould wrote *Mehalah* during his time at East Mersea, and when it was first published in 1880 it was very well received and referred to as ‘the *Wuthering Heights* of the Essex salt marshes’. It is an historical novel set in Mersea and the surrounding area at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, and from the first page, Ray Island is central to the story as the home of Mehalah and her mother who live there in a small farmhouse.

It is known that Baring Gould liked to base the characters in his novels on real people, and this has provoked the most frequently asked questions about the Ray: ‘Who was the real Mehalah? and ‘Was there ever a house on the island?’

As warden of Ray Island, I was asked in January 2010 to assist a small team of archaeologists commissioned by the National Trust to survey the site. This was purely a visual survey (much to my disappointment there was to be no trench digging) but I was able to give the experts some bits of brick and pottery that I had discovered over the years. Some interesting facts have emerged from this survey, and these formed the basis of my talk at Mersea Museum's recent AGM. Since then, I have conducted some research of my own into the background of some of the people on whom Baring Gould based his characters.

Sabine Baring Gould was an extraordinary man in his own right. Well known in the latter half of the 19th century for his prodigious output of fiction and non-fiction, he was a complex, controlled man with a degree of eccentricity. He is almost forgotten today but if he is remembered at all it is for writing the words of two hymns: 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and 'Now the Day is Over'.

Although he was a devout and pious clergyman, he possessed a great deal of charm and a good sense of humour. An independent, versatile thinker who was interested in myths, legends and folklore as well as the scientific developments of the time, he often expressed opinions that upset traditionalists in the church establishment and society in general. But among those who knew him well and in the congregations that he administered he was popular and well liked, with one unfortunate exception: the people of East Mersea.

Sabine Baring Gould was born in January 1834, the first child of Edward and Sophia Baring Gould. The family owned a manor house and a 3,000 acre estate in Lew Trenchard, near Okehampton, Devon.

His father was a retired cavalry officer who was extremely fond of travelling, and from 1837 onwards he took the family on extended tours of Europe. They rarely stayed in England for any length of time until the final tour ended in 1851, when the family returned to settle permanently in Devon.

Edward Baring Gould was a reserved, disciplined and precise man who was known for not showing any feelings. He tried hard to suppress Sabine's leanings towards the
arts, encouraging him instead to enter the army or become an engineer. Sabine's mother, by contrast, was a kind, sensitive woman and a devout Christian. It is clear that she was the main influence on her son's upbringing and future development.

In 1852, Sabine was admitted to Clare College, Cambridge to study classics. Following his mother's influence he set up a holy club that administered to the poor, but his caring attitude and outward piety led many of his fellow students to regard him as mad. He was subjected to a great deal of vicious and malicious gossip in his first year at Cambridge.

He gained his BA in 1857 and, seeking independence from his family, began to earn his living from teaching, mainly at Hurstpierpoint School in Sussex where his eccentricities and sense of humour made him a popular tutor. At one time he kept a pet bat that used to hang upside down from his gown as he taught in class (the poor creature suffered an unfortunate fate when a school maid accidentally trod on it).

During this period of his life, Sabine taught himself Icelandic and went on a lengthy tour of Iceland, extending his knowledge of myths and legends through his studies of the Eddas, the Norse Icelandic sagas.

In 1864, Sabine was ordained into the Church of England. His first appointment was as a curate to the Reverend John Sharp, the vicar of Horbury near Wakefield, Yorkshire. On the instructions of the Reverend Sharp, Sabine set up a mission and evening school in Horbury Brig and here, among the mill workers, he became a popular and well-respected figure. He was especially known as a natural storyteller who would have the mill workers' children begging him for stories at the end of evening school classes.

It was at Horbury that Sabine, now thirty years old, met and fell in love with Grace Taylor, a mill girl nearly half his age. Their relationship and intention to marry was opposed by both their families and also upset the local middle classes who felt that their daughters would have been a more suitable choice for such an eligible bachelor.

The Reverend Sharp realised that Sabine's feelings for Grace were genuine, and he arranged for her to go and live with his relatives in York for two years where she could learn middle class ways and manners. In 1868, Sabine Baring Gould and Grace Taylor were married at last.

In March 1871 Sabine Baring Gould and his family arrived on Mersea. He was to be the rector at East Mersea for the next ten years, but it is well documented that he found life difficult there. He complained that the inhabitants of his parish were 'dull, reserved, shy and suspicious' and that 'I never managed to understand them, nor they to understand me.'

Baring Gould was well aware that he had been sent to this remote, isolated place as a form of exile. There were a number of complex reasons why this had happened, and these would make for a full article in their own right. Suffice it to say that his independent thinking and radical views had made him powerful enemies in the
church hierarchy. They wanted him sent off to a remote part of the country where he could no longer mix with refined, educated men of culture and equal standing. In such a place he could no longer easily voice his opinions on the major political and religious issues of the day. Mersea, it was felt, would be perfect.

Nevertheless, Mersea was to provide the setting for what is regarded as Baring Gould's greatest work of fiction, *Mehalah*. A darkly tragic novel, it is based on the people and places he found in and around the Island, and he used real names for some of the characters and places. De Witt, Mussett, Mersea, the Ray, Sunken Island, Salcott and Virley all feature in the story, but this has resulted in endless speculation about who the main characters really were. Was there a real Mehalah? Who was Elijah Rebow? Was there ever a house on Ray Island? The answer to the last question is yes, there is a strong evidence of a building having existed on the Ray, but not in Baring Gould's time on Mersea.

The opening page of *Mehalah* contains this passage: ‘At the close of the last century there stood on the Ray a small farmhouse built of tarred wreckage timber, and roofed with red pantiles’. The archaeological evidence confirms that there was indeed a building there until some time in the 18th century. A building platform and a nearby midden heap containing pottery fragments dating to the 18th century and earlier have been found. The midden was not fully explored as this would have involved excavations, but this might be a project for the future.

Fragments of terracotta pantiles have been discovered at the site, together with locally produced and crudely made bricks dated to around 1450. A probable time scale for a building on the Ray therefore runs from the mid-15th century to some time in the 18th century.

We can be certain that this building did not survive beyond the start of the 19th century because of an accurate map of the Ray in the Mersea Museum collection that was drawn in 1817 when the island was part of Mersea Hall Estate. It shows two fields with a pond alongside the field boundary, but there is no sign of any building; nor do buildings appear on maps produced after that date.

The evidence suggests that a farmhouse, as described by Baring Gould, did once exist on the Ray and he would probably have heard stories about it. Perhaps it was destroyed by fire, as in Mehalah. Such an event would mean that it would be remembered by local people for many years after it happened.

And what of the villainous Elijah Rebow? Baring Gould tells us that he based the character on a dissenter who lived in West Mersea and had rented the glebe lands from a previous (non resident) rector.

When the Reverend Musselwhite came to West Mersea in 1863, he took the glebe back from the dissenter who had rented it for a sum far below its true value. After his first harvest was gathered in and the ricks were thatched, the Reverend Musselwhite journeyed into Colchester. However, before he left Mersea his churchwarden insisted that while he was in town he should insure his ricks to their full value. This he did within minutes of the insurance office closing for the day. On
returning to Mersea, the Reverend was again approached by the churchwarden asking if he had insured the ricks. When it was confirmed that indeed he had, the churchwarden reported that the ricks were ablaze. The dissenter had set them on fire as an act of revenge for not being allowed to retain the glebe. The insurance company tried hard to obtain evidence against this man but failed, as all the residents of West Mersea were apparently so afraid of him that they would not speak out against him.

If the person who was farming the glebe in the early 1860s could be traced in the church records we would know the name of the local man who inspired Baring Gould to create Elijah Rebow.

Information about the fictional heroine Mehalah and the person who she was based on is much more sketchy. Baring Gould does not mention her in his Reminiscences, but there was someone who spelled her name ‘Mahala’ alive at that time. The second daughter of the ferryman at East Mersea Stone, Mahala was born in February 1858 to William and Hannah Baker who at that time lived in the Ship House at East Mersea.

By the time that Baring Gould arrived in 1871 Mahala was thirteen years old and working as a domestic servant in a customs officer's household in Brightlingsea. Her mother Hannah had died in 1868, and her father was married again to one Anne Hall in 1869. William and Anne Baker lived on an old barge called Friends Goodwill which was moored alongside East Mersea Stone, and from here they would ferry people across the river Colne to Brightlingsea. Baring Gould knew them well and frequently took tea with them on their barge. He would have known Mahala through this connection.

During these meetings on the barge (and at other times) the second Mrs Baker was frequently the worse for drink, and she is mentioned several times in Baring Gould's Reminiscences. One amusing incident is related thus:

“We went often to Baker's boat and had tea with him. Whilst tea was brewing he would set a pail of shrimps before us, on the deck, and bid us fall to until the tea was ready in the cabin. Baker himself was a sober man, but his wife was often tipsy. When she returned late from Brightlingsea, overcome with liquor, Baker hauled up the ladder. He emptied a pail of water over her head, as she stood shouting for admittance, and left her to scold, swear and shiver till he considered her to be sufficiently sober to be admitted. I used her in my story Mehalah.”

I am certain that Anne Baker was the model for Mrs De Witt.
Of the real Mahala we know very little. Records show that by 1876 she was living at 7, Mersea Road, Colchester. In June of that year she married John McCart, an Irishman who was a private in the army. The 1881 census shows them living in the barracks at Aldershot where John was still a private in the 45th Sherwood Foresters. By 1891 John McCart had left the army and he and Mahala were living in Colchester again, this time at 9, Mersea Road. In 1893, at the age of just thirty-five, Mahala died of consumption. As far as is known, there were no children of this marriage.

It was a sad, premature end to the life of a young woman whose name, at the very least, was the inspiration for a powerful novel by a remarkable clergyman.
Sabine`s Mersea Wordtide

David Shacklock

Background
The ‘Management’ approached me last winter with a view to giving a rundown of SBG’s sermon series; this struck me as potentially tedious for both researcher and hearer, so I am attempting, with permission, an overview of all his Mersea based stuff. Since they have been the subjects of previous gatherings, I will only touch lightly on Mehalah, The Vicar of Morwenstow, and The Lives of the Saints.

Summary
For this I am entirely indebted to Roger Bristow`s marvelous Bibliography. During the Mersea years Baring-Gould published over 80 titles: books, articles, sermon collections, and the occasional pamphlet (but not including introductions and letters to the Press). For those interested in statistics I am counting multi-volume works as one title, and likewise series (e.g. Foreign Reformation Sketches) - for journals such as Church Review and Sacristy - as one title. During the previous decade the total had been more like 120; in the post-Mersea decade say 150; in the ’90s about 250; and after 1900 a further 320 items. However his ’book’ production had risen steadily throughout the decades, from 11 in the ’60s to 16 from Mersea, then 28 in the ’80s, peaking at 40 in the ‘90s, tailing off to 47 in the final two decades.

Mehalah was his fourth novel - and the only one written on Mersea; the acclaim it received, coupled with his fund-raising needs at Lew Trenchard, galvanised his fiction writing; whereas the theological book tally doubled on Mersea, leveled with the novels in the `80s and declined in the `90s (in favour of folklore). After 1900 it rose again, on a par in these years with topographical work - by which time the fiction had declined. So the flavour of the Mersea years was definitely theological: 12 out of his 16 books, and at least half of his 60 or so articles. But it should also be said that even the theological interest was primarily in people rather than ideas. And Sabine`s theology was coloured by romance more than reason.

So we come to the first major publication of the ’70s: Legends of Old Testament Characters, published by Macmillan in 1871 - therefore not strictly a Mersea production, as the work for it must have already been done before the move from Yorkshire. Indeed it was advertised in the book In Exitu Israel, published in 1870. I include it here anyway to illustrate the point about ‘romantic theology’. In passing we note a bibliographical point: the original Macmillan title is Legends of Old Testament Characters, whereas the American publication by Holt & Williams in 1872 is Legends of the Patriarchs & Prophets, but the same book. The author claims
to have sifted through multitudinous sources to find items that seem to have some
genuine foundation, but confesses that `a certain curious interest attaches to these
legends`. If the book is well received, he says that another will follow, based on
New Testament characters. What actually happened was that he wrote one article for
Sacristy in the same year on the Blessed Virgin Mary, and then the idea morphed
into The Lives of the Saints, with half a dozen characters previewed in Sacristy and
The Church Times.

The Lives of the Saints

And so his great work of the Mersea years took shape, one monthly volume to be
delivered to Hodges the publisher every six months. As the project went on, some
months had too much material for one physical volume, so July, October &
November had 2 volumes each, bringing the total to 15, although the volume
numbering stuck to the 1-12 sequence. As Roger Bristow points out, there was to
have been a supplement, consisting of a list of the saints, historical calendars and a
complete index, but this did not appear until the re-issues by Nimmo (1897) & Grant
(1914). I am a bit mystified by the Bibliography entry showing a revised Hodges
edition of 17 volumes dated 1872-89. Has anyone seen it, and what did the extra 2
volumes consist of?

For this great labour of travel and research SBG was to have received £50 per
volume, but at some point the payments lapsed as the publisher went out of business.
They had moved from 46 Bedford Street to 24 King William Street in 1874/5 - was
that a consequence or a precursor of their problems? A thousand copies of The Lives
were ordered prior to publication, and the first edition was sold out on the day. The
price according to the February volume was seven shillings a quarter. Up to three
editions or `thousands` were printed in the Hodges years; changes were of minor
significance. Considering the rather lush covers, with a gilt depiction of a different
apostle for each month, perhaps the price was too low. Or maybe the failure of the
business was due to other reasons altogether.

The Preface is worth reading: it underlines the immensity of the task, his debt to
previous writers (the Bollandists and Alban Butler in particular), his inclusion of
other contributors (eg Kingsley) for the sake of variety, and his endeavour to be
acceptable to Roman Catholicism and the Church of England alike. He wrote

“…the writer of a hagiology is hurried into Byzantine politics, and has to collect the
thread of a saintly confessor`s life from the tangle of political and ecclesiastical intrigue [. . .] and thence he is [. . .] landed in the romance world of Irish hagiology, where the
footing is as insecure as on the green bogs of the Emerald Isle. Thence he strides into the
midst of the wreck of Charlemagne`s empire, to gather among the splinters of history a few
poor mean notices of those holy ones living then, whose names have survived, but whose
acts are all but lost. And then the scene changes, and he treads the cool cloister of a
mediaeval abbey, to glean materials for a memoir of some peaceful recluse, which may
reflect the crystalline purity of the life without being wholly colourless of incident.”
The early volumes were very well received, but before long controversy arose, and the work was banned by the Roman Catholics. Of the total of 2187 ‘biographies’ (I don’t know how Dickinson makes it 3600!), 53 were of Biblical characters or events, 1895 of post-Biblical ‘saints’, and 239 were miscellaneous or ‘multiple’ entries. Dickinson comments

“In later years it was remembered with loathing by children of High Church clergy, who had suffered throughout life because they had been named after obscure and curiously labelled saints unearthed by their fathers from Baring-Gould’s Lives.”

My own view is that he wasted a lot of time and energy on an impossible task, to very little reward and a strain on his health. He had already been suffering from bronchitis before he started work on The Lives, and then rheumatism prompted him to take a summer break in the Algau Alps in 1875.

To complete this section on ‘religious biography’, brief mention must be made of The Vicar of Morwenstow. He rushed this book out in 1876 after Robert Hawker died, in the light of rumours that other authors were intending to do likewise, and wanting to give fair treatment of someone he had regarded as a friend. However Hawker’s family took umbrage at some of the content and he was obliged to produce a revised edition. I once tried to make a close comparison of the first and second editions, and was hard put to it to find any significant changes. You will remember that Patrick Hutton wrote an excellent biography of Hawker, as well as leading a Hawker-flavoured gathering for the Society.\(^1\) His final chapter summarises the controversy in barn-storming fashion. All I will add is that I think both biographies are well worth reading.

**Sermons**

Next we must come to the Sermons. Dickinson claims that there are a total of 14 collections, of which nine were Mersea productions. The problem of establishing numbers is firstly the question of whether to include ‘lectures’ in the total, and secondly that several collections had more than one volume or series. And whereas the term ‘series’ in SBG’s folklore output means the same as ‘volume’, when it comes to the sermons the terms are used differently. Furthermore the numbers mentioned do not include SBG’s contributions to other people’s collections, such as Plain Preaching for Poor People, or single sermons such as The Power of the Press, preached at St.Paul’s Walworth (1873). Typically, the collections would cover Sundays or Saints’ Days through the year. For instance, of items in my possession, there is Village Preaching for a Year. Volume I (3rd edition 1877) covers Advent to Whitsun; volume II (2nd edition 1876) deals with Trinity and all the Sundays after, plus a further 20 sermon sketches. To confuse the bibliographer, the 10th edition of volume II has no date and is described as ‘1st series’. I also have a copy of Village

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Preaching for Saints’ Days (1st series volume III 1881), covering St. Andrew’s to All Saints. From the first of these two I would like to read part of the sermon for Trinity 15, (no.52, The Means of Grace, on Genesis 45.27).

“There is a college chapel at Cambridge, built by King Henry VII, with immense windows on both sides, all filled with the richest stained glass. On the north side are subjects from the Old Testament, on the south side are Gospel events. The sun streams through these, but only a reflected light passes through the former. Sometimes I have walked on the lawn which lies to the north of the chapel on a summer day, and have seen the south windows blazing with light, shining through the north ones, for the chapel is narrow without aisles. Whenever I saw thus the Gospel story, I thought it was a figure of what we really see in the Bible [. . .]

I have seen water meadows near Salisbury, numerous little ditches, traverse every part of a field. A perfect net-work is cast over the meadow. A sluice is opened, and the water flows through, and fills every runnel and dyke, great and small, and the moisture makes the meadows grow rich crops of grass evenly over their whole expanse. The heart is the sluice, through it let Baptismal grace flow, and fill with divine influence every vein of your daily life, till all your acts, and thoughts, and words grow rich with a waving harvest of Christian graces, beautiful in the sight of men, precious in the eyes of God`.

I hope you will agree that contrary to many published sermons, even of such eminent preachers as John Wesley, they are remarkably compelling and accessible. Skeffington was his publisher for nearly all his sermons, and also his nine lectures published under the title Some Modern Difficulties (1875), and his ten lectures entitled The Mystery of Suffering (1877). Prior to Skeffington, Masters had published his first two collections of the Mersea era: 100 sermon Sketches for Extempore Preachers (1871 but presumably prepared at Dalton), and Village Conferences on the Creed (1873). The pattern seems to have been that a collection was produced every alternate calendar year until The Lives had been completed, and then followed a burst of activity before the move to Lew Trenchard with Sermons to Children (1879), The Preacher’s Pocket (1880), Village Preaching for Saints’ Days and The Village Pulpit (both 1881).

In the final section of this talk we look at the four notable exceptions to the theological flavour of the Mersea years as far as book publication goes. First comes Yorkshire Oddities, Incidents & Strange Events, the forerunner of three other similar titles spread over many years - the others being Historical Oddities (1889,91), Devonshire Characters (1908) and Cornish Characters (1909). Yorkshire Oddities was published by Hodges in 1874 (two volumes), running eventually to six editions - in one volume from the fourth edition. The fifth edition was republished in paperback by Smith, Settle in 1987. Clearly this was a putting together of SBG’s gleanings from his years in the north and so not in any meaningful sense a `product` of life on Mersea. Indeed in the Preface the author offers the book as a tribute to the enjoyment of his years in Yorkshire `by a migratory penman from the south`. The word Characters could well have been included in the title, since of the 28 chapters 21 were sketches of people, whereas four were about places, one was an Incident, and two were Oddities or Strange Events. Baring-Gould took care to give authorities
where possible, e.g. for ‘The One Pound Note’. As far as I am aware only one piece, ‘The Bogart of Hellen-Pot’, is found elsewhere - in the March 1867 issue of *Once a Week*. Perhaps in keeping with the theme, a malicious ghost inserts a second ‘g’ in ‘Bogart’ in the running title. The modern paperback version has the added charm of Ron Tiner’s cover depicting Denny Hirst riding a bull to hounds, plus twenty other drawings.

Apart from *Yorkshire Oddities* and of course *Mehalah*, the prevailing sub theme of the 1870s was Germany. SBG had at least five visits there, the longest and most significant being the winters of 1877/8 and 1880/1 spent in Freiburg in the Black Forest. These visits launched a string of books for different publishers in the ten years following: *Germany, Past & Present* (Kegan, Paul & Trench 1881), *Germany* in Sampson Low’s Foreign Countries series (1883 - also found bound in with David Key’s *Austria-Hungary* under the series heading Peoples Abroad), another book with just the title *Germany* (T Fisher Unwin 1886 in their Story of the Nations series), and *The Church in Germany* (Wells, Gardner, Darton 1891 in the series The National Churches). The first of these, the only one which belongs here, *Germany, Past & Present*, is a social history and commentary, dealing for instance with the country’s nobility, peasantry, marriage customs, education, culture and religion. There is a 47-page chapter on women, covering what he calls the ‘folklorish premisses’ by which they had been treated, and illustrated with sketches from ‘romantic history’ (but passing over the middle ages). One or two extracts will give a flavour of his thinking.

“We English are a mixture of many races, and our characteristic is Heterogeneity. Women accentuate the peculiarities of the race to which they belong. Corinthian brass was the melting and flowing together of all the metals in a blazing city. It was a precious and highly esteemed amalgam. Let us flatter ourselves that we are the Corinthian brass of Europe, only let us not forget that we have not the individuality of the Celt, or the Saxon, or the Angle, or the Jute, or the Roman, or the Dane, or the Norman. Each, when melted in, lost its distinguishing features. It is so with our women - they are the most beautiful, shining, precious of amalgams, but they have no organic, original individuality. Look at the whole course of our history, look at the women of the present day. They have a little of everything, of the vivacity of the Celt and the domesticity of the Saxon, the adventure of the Dane, and dignity of the Norman.

[. . .] It is of all these little mickles that the muckle is made up. The soup is one of many ingredients, but it is not stock. It is not so with the German women: they lack a thousand of those charms which make the Englishwoman the most perfect lady in the world. But they have, what our women have not, an original stamp and an original atomic weight of their own - a thing no compound substance can claim” (p131).

[. . .] A woman without religion is a flower without scent, and if dipped in the paraffin of philosophy acquires pungency, but not fragrance” (p144).

And concerning hall & recto, rich & poor:
“In England every country house and parsonage has been a quiet nursery of gentility and purity. In Germany there are few country houses, and the parsonages are occupied by families of burger or bauer origin. The pastors are, with rare exceptions, men of cultivated minds, men whom it is a pleasure to meet and converse with. But their wives are of citizen class, gentle, domestic women, but without the polish that is expected of the parson’s wife in England, and she and her husband are not received into the best society. The pastor is poor, and has to scramble on with a large family on a small income. He cannot give his children a gentle education.

In England the hall and the rectory are on terms of intimacy. The daughter of the parson not infrequently becomes lady at the hall, and the younger son of the squire is settled in the country rectory. We, who live in England, have little idea of the influence on culture possessed by the parsonage in our island. The young ladies from it grow up active in good works, loving and caring for the poor, looking after them in sickness, taking interest in the school-girls, teaching the lads in the night-schools, organising cottage-garden shows and harvest festivals. And when they pass, as they so often do, to country homes of their own, in the hall or rectory, they carry with them their sympathy for those beneath them, and are in their generation fountains of light, stars beaming down into dark hearts, and making them twinkle with smiles. It has been my fate to be for some years in parishes without resident gentry, and where there have never been resident incumbents. The moral and social condition of these parishes is dark indeed compared to that where hall and rectory were ever influencing farmhouse and cottage.

[. . .] I have seen the rudest village bumpkins humanised by a winter night-school conducted by the rector’s daughters - not humanised only, but made gentle and chivalrous.

[ . . .] The rectory party and those in the hall are on familiar and often affectionate terms. There is no perceptible difference in culture between them; indeed, one family by birth and bringing up is as good as the other. The parsonage interests the hall in the matters of the parish, and so all classes meet in general sympathy and exchange of kindlinesses, and in so doing react on one another; the poor receive light from above, and in return give back what is as precious - the feeling of that to which so ugly a name has been given - human solidarity, but which in Christian parlance is real charity. The rich knows the poor not by the outside only, but is acquainted with his wants, his shortcomings, his temptations, and seeks to help him, at least to make allowance for his deficiencies. Philistinism begins with disassociation of man from man, and class from class` (p477).

Sabine himself acknowledges that the unfavourable reviews he received for this work gave rise to the bitterness often commented upon in Mehalah. He wrote his most famous novel in a month and, as he said, ‘poured out in it my wrath and bile’.

We cannot leave this bit of the subject without reference to a little known title and the strange and strained relationships surrounding it - namely Sabine’s translation of Wilhelmine von Hillern’s novel Ernestine, published in 2 volumes by De La Rue in 1879. The original was published in Berlin under the title Ein Arzt der Seele in 1869.
The following year it was translated for the American market by Annie Lee Wister under the title *Only a Girl, or A Physician for the Soul*. It has been described as a bluestocking novel, but is really about the struggle of a highly intelligent girl, Ernestine, to gain acceptance for her intellectual achievements among her peers. It has echoes of the gender intrigues of the Bronte sisters, George Eliot and others in this country a few decades earlier. Martin Graebe has drawn attention in Newsletter 66 issued in June to the controversy that broke out (albeit briefly) in the States through the pages of *The Critic* of March 12th 1881, a slight reworking of a complaint from the firm Lippincott of Philadelphia which had appeared in *The Athenaeum* on Feb.26th of that year. The assertion is that Baring-Gould claimed originality for his translation, whereas apart from the first two chapters it is almost word for word the same as Mrs.Wister’s. Owing to the change of title from *Only a Girl* to *Ernestine* the American publisher William Gottsberger was unaware that the two books were the same, and presumably De La Rue was equally unaware and did not mention it in any correspondence they would surely have had.

To get another angle on this we must trace SBG’s relationship with Frau von Hillern. Born in 1836 Wilhelmine Birch-Pfeiffer, she had been an actress until her marriage to von Hillern, a retired judge and Chamberlain to the Grand-Duke of Baden, living in Freiburg, where Baring-Gould was staying in 1877. Turning to writing in her mid-30s *Ein Arzt der Seele* had been her first novel (1869); more highly regarded was *The Vulture Maiden* (*Die Geier Wally* 1875). SBG appears to suggest that when they met he was already engaged in translating the former title (*FR* p86) and was happy to give her half the fee. He subsequently offered to translate the latter for the English stage. In 1880/1 there was much negotiation over production rights, performers &c. and the relationship which Sabine had been looking forward to resuming on his return to Freiburg ‘degenerated into an acrimonious legal dispute’, as Ron Wawman describes it, and led to the now celebrated Diary passage, ‘I am very much like a buoy. Every wave goes over me, and yet I am never completely submerged’. While it is not impossible that von Hillern was unaware of the Wister translation it does not explain SBG’s apparent use of it (apart from the first two chapters), or his sharing of the translation fee. Sabine has been accused of absent mindedness and a flawed memory for dates, but it is difficult in the extreme to see him deliberately plagiarising and entering into deceit for monetary gain. Could the publisher somehow have muddled the two sets of manuscripts and used chapters one and two of the Baring-Gould *Ernestine* and the rest (nearly two volumes!) of the *Only a Girl* set: but this would have to have been De La Rue not Gottsberger. And it also presumes that SBG did not have sight of the finished publications. Mystery so far unsolved!

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East Mersea Church (Postcard in Martin Graebe’s collection)

East Mersea Church Interior (Postcard in Martin Graebe’s collection)
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. He is also the Newsletter Editor for SBGAS. And, once again, he was a co-organiser of the 2010 meeting. As a professional geologist, he has often deployed the knowledge and experience gained in his career to explain the formations that make up the physical framework for Baring-Gould’s books, for the benefit of SBGAS members.

**Troy White** has now returned to the USA, having completed his PhD at Warwick University. His doctoral thesis was, *The Gothic Threshold of Sabine Baring-Gould: The Religion and Gothic Fiction of a Victorian "Squarson."* He has delighted SBGAS members with his fresh viewpoint on Baring-Gould’s novels and his ability to explain literary technicalities to a lay audience.

**David Nicholls** is a retired school teacher and lecturer and is the voluntary warden for Ray Island. He is also a member of the Mersea Museum Society and has researched many aspects of local history related to *Mehalah* and to Baring-Gould’s time on the island.

**David Shacklock** was the founder of SBGAS and, for many years, its Chairman and guiding light. He was also the first Editor of the *SBGAS Newsletter* in the days before computers eased the burdens of publication for the non-professional. The editorials and other articles that he wrote at that time still contain much of interest and value to those interested in the work of Sabine Baring-Gould. He is also an expert on his published works and an active dealer in his books.
GLORY:

(Or,

WHEN I HOLD, I HOLD FAST.)

A. Drama

IN SIX ACTS AND THIRTEEN SCENES

BY

MRS. OSCAR BERINGER

Author of Beloved of the Gods.

Opera Libretti: Twelfth Night; Samson and Delilah; Nala and Damayanti, etc. etc.

Motto: "When I hold, I hold fast."

Period — 1780.

Scene — The Essex Marshes.

London:

Printed by J. Miles and Co., Wardour Street, Oxford Street, W.

1885.