

The Memoirs of abbé François Duine

Ron Wawman writes: Souvenirs et observations de l'abbé François Duine, edited by Bernard Heudré, was published in 2009 by Presses Universitaires de Rennes. The abbé, who died in the same year as Sabine at the age of 54, first met him in 1901-2 when Sabine was residing with his family in Dinan, France. The two became good friends and corresponded regularly. It is understood that the abbé was a guest at Lew Trenchard on a number of occasions between 1901 and 1914. However apart from a brief and uninformative mention in an undated letter to his daughter Mary that was probably written in the early 1900s the abbé's name does not, as far as I am aware, appear in any published or unpublished work by Sabine.

Nevertheless, whatever impression l'abbé Duine may have made on Sabine, this book makes very clear that the abbé took great interest in Sabine and was very familiar with his work, so much so that almost seven pages of his memoirs are devoted to a well written contemporary account of Sabine that is dispassionate, searching and perceptive. The two clerics had shared interests and would seem to have discussed, but not always agreed on, a wide range of topics. Whilst fulsome in his praises of Sabine's generous spirit and the brilliance of his writing, abbé Duine nevertheless pulled no punches when commenting on the lack of academic and scientific rigour in much of Sabine's work as well as his prejudices and his aversion to criticism.

A small number of editing notes appear in the text. These are denoted by italics and square brackets. I have otherwise resisted the temptation to comment further on l'abbé Duine's appraisal and allowed his eloquence to speak for itself. The extensive footnotes were written by the abbé not by me. I have added one explanatory endnote.

I am grateful to Père Bernard for permission to quote from this book and to Alan Payne for his painstaking translation of the section on Sabine from the original.

The Reverend Baring-Gould

In a gracious residence in the prettiest English county, in that part of Devon which touches the Duchy of Cornwall, at Lew Trenchard, a foundation of the Norman Conquest in Celtic Dumnonia [*which originally comprised all of the celtic lands of Cornwall, Devon and West Somerset*], a gentleman of breeding and letters lives out his long and productive life in a Manor House of the time of Queen Elizabeth. He has restored, extended and enriched the house and has decorated the walls with elegant panelling from France, luxurious tapestries from England, antiques from every country and innumerable books.

The reverend Sabine Baring-Gould was born at Exeter on 29th January 1834; he belongs to a noble and ancient family established for several centuries in

Devonshire. He is the grandson of an English Admiral⁴⁷. His coat of arms carries the words *gold ever bright* of which the double meaning is based on the archaic pronunciation of the first word. It can be translated as "*gold without tarnish* and *Gould without stain*". Slim and lean of figure with a high forehead, he has clear blue eyes and smiling lips. His handshake is cordial, his manners of a distinguished simplicity, his gait rapid like his speech. The taste for travel and a curiosity of mind are perhaps his dominant characteristics.

He has crossed the mists of Iceland, he has stayed several times in Germany, he has toured in Switzerland and Italy. He knows France, but he has explored especially the Midi and Brittany. Napoleon, as well as the Caesars, local and traditional customs such as old popular songs, descriptive writing, history, the customs of a province, the picturesque lives of Celtic Saints have all inspired his pen. All of his observations in the course of time and space, in libraries or in museums, suggest to him colourful pictures and re-creations

⁴⁷ Baring Gould published his *Early Reminiscences* in June 1923, which have allowed me to make a more detailed study. His father, an officer in India, whose career was marred by an accident, was of a character little given to flexibility. A Whig in a Tory society, open of spirit in a limited horizon, he mistrusted the gentry of the West and did not much like people of the Church, travelling ceaselessly to escape from boredom. This spirit of independence was typical of the Reverend. Baring-Gould died on 2nd January 1924. Anglican, man of controversy, and humanist, these were the centres of gravity of Baring-Gould. He had a taste for History and the temperament of a poet at the heart of his character. In those undertakings that require pure objectivity and which are the preserve of erudition and the critical faculty, he fails; in endeavours that demand imagination, with the art of depiction and storytelling, he is brilliant; but he was happiest when engaged on literary works that occupied the space in between.

Iceland, its scenes and sagas, Maps and illustrations, London 1863 (in an English catalogue of recent years, the original edition is marked at 59 francs 35 centimes).

The life of Napoleon Bonaparte, London, 1897, in quarto with 436 engravings (in a French catalogue, 45 francs).

In troubadour land, a ramble in Provence and Languedoc, London, 1891.

The deserts of Southern France, London, 1894 (2 vol., with engravings and popular songs)

Curious myths of the middle ages, London, 1884 (with illustrations).

Legends of Old Testament Characters, from the Talmud and other sources, London, 1871, 2 volumes.

Past [sic] Mediaeval Preachers, some account of the most celebrated preachers of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, with an outline of their sermons, and specimens of their style, London, 1865.

Lost and hostile Gospels, an account of the Toledoth Jeshu; two Hebrew Gospels, circulating in the Middle Ages, and extant fragments of the Gospels of the first Three Centuries of Petrine and Pauline Origin. Some modern difficulties, 1875.

Freaks of fanaticism, 1891.

The vicar of Morwenstowe (life of Reverend Hawter [sic] was much read in religious circles and I believe that the influence of the author in Anglicanism is by no means negligible. Baring-Gould and Fisher, *The lives of the British Saints*, London 1907 – 1913, - 4 handsome volumes in Octavo, illustrated – The appendix (vol IV, p. 369-438) is by the Reverend Fisher. All of the remainder is more or less entirely the work of the Reverend Baring-Gould. This is a considerable work that remains to be revised. I do not mention his *Lives of the Saints* in 16 volumes to which one refers in the Anglican Church but which form a work which cannot have much significance in the eyes of a historian.

of life, unusual and full of movement. With him, everything ends up as an article or a book. He knows old statues, what remains of rood screens or lofts, the appearance of the sea, the marvellous solitude of the valley, the elements, in a word, what gives so much appeal to our little Breton chapels just as much as he has enjoyed the majestic Roman ruins in Provence and the studies that he has made on the ground of the routes of Roman troops in Gaul. Many times in his own country with his pick in his hand, he has worked like a labourer on prehistoric excavations. In how many archaeological excursions has he not taken part?

But this intellectual and novelist with whom a sense of irony is always present and who delights in storytelling and whose curiosity of mind is quite without bounds is at the same time a knowledgeable landowner who knows how to draw up architectural plans and himself supervise those who work in his estate and garden. He sends his potatoes and his flowers to horticultural exhibitions. No-one is less disinterested in the life of his own times, and no-one is less withdrawn from his duties towards the community. A family man, he has brought up numerous children of whom some are spread out to the farthest parts of the world, in India or in America. I have scarcely ever seen a more touching spectacle than Mr Baring-Gould surrounded by his family reciting with them Morning Prayer.

The Lord of the Manor of Lew⁴⁸ is also the Rector of the Parish of which he is Patron. And if he has the help of a *vicar* to keep up the services while he is absent, he has none the less the duty of feeding his sheep with a short and original sermon of a high educational content in a form which commands attention, as one can deduce from the innumerable sermons that he has delivered to the printers. He officiates at Mass unless he is prevented by serious business. The Church boys' singing group of his Parish which is an attractive creation in a simple hamlet is his work: it uses the tunes of our most popular hymns and the plainsong of our choirs.

One of his daughters in particular who loves music and has plenty of energy has got involved to produce this success. Sometimes he organises teas and events for the people on the terraces of his Manor House. He readily finds inspiration in what has struck him in our Gallic churches. Amongst the works that he has read with the greatest interest must be included the *Letters of a country priest* and the *Letters of a canton priest* which have encountered such great success amongst our clergy and which are by Yves Le Querdec, pen name of M Fonsegrive⁴⁹, teacher of philosophy in a lycee in Paris. The Reverend Baring-Gould has a lively interest in everything that concerns the Church. He has himself played a part in several collections of studies, of

⁴⁸ Pronounced "Lou". It is from the old French word "L'ève": water (Lew Trenchard means "the stream Trenchard". The name Trenchard appears in *Cromwell* by Victor Hugo: "Trenchard also seems discontented and sullen" (Act II, scene V)

⁴⁹ Le Querdec has also published "*The journal of a Bishop*", of which the second part was analysed by Mgr Duchesne in the *Bulletin Critique* (year 1897, p 677).

abstracts, and of ecclesiastical polemics. He detests the Holy See which he considers to be a nest of superstition, of tyranny and of political manipulation but he does not have the least aversion to Protestantism. He is a High Churchman, who is a man of faith and of order, but who keeps within bounds in everything. He told me on the subject of Lammenais: "Yes, he was a genius of great strength, but with a blinkered mind, as are all those who are of an autocratic nature. He did not understand that truths are relative, that is to say that they must remain consistent, one illuminating another, without ever imposing themselves autocratically, one upon another."⁵⁰

An aristocrat, he does not entertain too many illusions about the affairs of the world. He genuinely likes the people amongst whom he mixes easily. He has a generous heart. And our province owes him gratitude. It is not only that he has on occasions made donations to our churches. During the crisis over sardines which was a veritable catastrophe for our maritime populations he wrote in English journals (at the end of January) an eloquent appeal entitled *Briton to Breton: Breton in Great Britain to Breton of Little Britain*. And in *The Times* of 5th March 1903, he was able to announce that the sum transferred to the English Consul at Brest reached Frs 32,900.90. This matter of charity caused more than 700 letters to be written to Mr Baring-Gould. The money was distributed through the hands of the Bishops of Quimper and Vannes and the admirals of Brest and Lorient.

He published his first book at the age of 20. In 1879, he came to fame through his fine story *Mehalah*. Since then, and especially since 1886, his pen has been of a prodigious productivity and variety. His novel *Perpetua* was issued as has already been said, in February 1899⁵¹. Then we were presented with an essay on the reconstruction of life in Nimes⁵² in the IIIrd Century and a table of the concerns of the Nuns of that time. Some characters were drawn with precision and warmth, and there were some moving scenes. The style of the book recalled *Fabiola* by Wiseman, *Quo Vadis* by Henryk Sienkiewietz, and the *Death of the gods* by Dmitry Merejkowky. Slavs and Saxons pour out of plays of a different stamp, *les Martyrs* by Chateaubriand. I translated *Perpetua*. Problems with the editors arose: I abandoned my work under fire; and I believe today that only the public of our religious institutions is interested in the Virgin of Nimes. Of all the stories of my host, the one that I read with the most spirit perhaps is called *In the roar of the Sea*⁵³. The author reveals himself there as the Paul

⁵⁰ In general, he says in a sermon (The Sunday Round, Part I, p 32) whatever is constructive is good and whatever is destructive is bad. Even so, there are destructive acts that are necessary, whatever regrets they may cause. And, for example, a revolution can be just, if the government has become tyrannical. His *Sermons to children, 1st series*, reached 13 reprints in 1912. The majority of his collections of sermons went into many editions.

⁵¹ *Perpetua* was translated into German and the English edition was sold out in just a few years.

⁵² His novel "*Noemi*" is also read in the Midi

⁵³ Le mugissement de la mer

Féval of Cornwall⁵⁴. We see there the sad situation at the deaths of rectors, their wives and their children. The sketch of the Reverend Desiderius Mules and the caricature of Uncle Zacharie Menaida give us pleasure. The fine and ingenious observations are without fault. The little church of St Enodoc which is sinking into the sand interests us and we listen to the reasons why the people of that place do not wish to contribute to its restoration. The essence of the book is about the family: a sister marries to save her brother. And just as Racine's Andromache said: "let us go to his grave to consult my husband", so she also says: "Let us go to his grave to ask my father : let us walk together to St Enodoc." In the literature of honest families, *In the roar of the sea* deserves a place of honour.

Pabo the Priest, published in New York in February 1900 takes us to the XIIth century⁵⁵. The bishop of Gaul of the see of St David has just died. Bernard, a Norman is named in his place, who will take part in the conquest. But he finds himself faced by the resistance of the ancient Celtic world personified by Pabo, the priest. A Gallic Princess, Nest, who has been forced to marry a son of King Henri 1st, leads us to understand how the union of the two nationalities comes about, or at least, how they reach agreement. The construction of this work is deft, quick, clear, strange, and dramatic. I have often dreamt of a novel which would have as its setting the sea, and which would have its main scenes in the town of Dol. Juthael⁵⁶, nicknamed the Archwolf represents in his person as a married archbishop in contempt of the canonical law the feudal Church against which the people muttered and sometimes rose in violence. Abbé Even would be the wise and knowing Church, and young Guilduin⁵⁷ the Church Mystical. The first is consecrated by Gregory VII, the second dies on a pilgrimage to the Virgin and his grave becomes a place of miracles. William the Conqueror crosses the sands of the Mont St Michel to rescue the Archwolf, who guides him in the attack on his rebellious castle. Fairs of the Middle Ages at Dol. Pilgrimages of children. The daughters of an Archbishop. Herein is a moment of our peninsular history which lends itself marvellously to the brush of a learned artist who

⁵⁴ On Paul Féval, see Biré, *Studies in History and Literature*, Lyon, Vitte, 1900, p304 et seq. In my youth we read with pleasure "The White Wolf", "Castle of the Poor", and "The fairy of the Sandbanks".

⁵⁵ In his "*Itinerarium Cambriae*", Giraud de Cambrie says: "Bernadus iste, quanquam in aliquot commendabilis, pompositatis tamen et ambitionis vitio, trans modestiam notabilis fuerat.". In his time, the Chapter made new initiatives in Rome to obtain a pardon on behalf of the Bishop. In my host's novel, Bernard is *trans modestiam notabilis*, but he is not at all *in aliquot commendabilis*. [*The Latin translates as: That Bernard, although in some things commendable, nevertheless, because of the vice of pomposity and ambition, had been notable beyond modesty.*]

⁵⁶ Juthael obtained the Archbishpric of Dol by misappropriation of public funds on the part of Duke Alain III. He was ordained around 1040 by the Breton bishops despite the Pope's interdiction. He married publicly and wasted the patrimony of the Church of Dol. Excommunicated, he took refuge in the Mont St Michel around 1076.

⁵⁷ St Guilduin, son of Rivallon, Lord of Combourg, was elected Archbishop of Dol by the Chapter. Believing himself to be too young to carry such a duty, he went to see Pope Gregory VII. On his return to France, he died at the Abbaye Saint-Pere of Chartres, where he is buried.

leaves nothing to be desired in the range of tragic feelings. What beautiful themes of admiration, of terror and of pity.

One could apply to Mr Baring-Gould the eulogy that the Venerable Bede bestowed upon an Abbott: *vir per omnia doctissimus*⁵⁸. Even so, his overriding quality is the imagination. In preaching, he proceeds not by reasoning and psychological analysis, but by brushstrokes, comparisons, allegories, multicoloured facets and little ingenious lectures. In History, he simplifies the study of source material and uses the method of the novelist. In linguistics, he is similar to the Abbé Deric⁵⁹ who wasted his time in seeing everything from the Celtic point of view. When by chance some specialists took notice of my reverend friend they savaged him beyond repair. The Jesuit Herbert Thurston who is one of the book worms of the British museum took him to task with civility, clarity, and not without irony in an article entitled *Devotions manufactured in Rome*⁶⁰. M Loth, teacher at the College de France, handled him with some roughness⁶¹ and reproached me in our conversations for having made known in Brittany a scholar with such defects⁶². And yet from the beginning of my relations with my host, I did have with the greatest possible circumspection my doubts on the character of his scientific knowledge⁶³ and I tried valiantly in our letters and exchanges to awake his prudence as regards the lines that he took in these areas of patient and difficult work. To the point where one day when I had sent him back certain pages he replied "I never read what displeases me or anything that attacks me". I fear that this man whose bibliography is so long and who is known throughout England, this pastor of souls whose hymns are sung in assemblies of the faithful may become quickly forgotten after his death and that he may have a reputation only amongst those who are keen on research.

Nevertheless his collection of folk songs (*Songs of the West, 1891*) form a document that one cannot overlook; *A Garland of Country Song, 1895*⁶⁴ constitutes a record that simply cannot be ignored. Moreover the exact

⁵⁸ "man who is wise in everything"

⁵⁹ Abbé Deric is unknown outside our province and his "*Ecclesiastical History of Brittany*" is just a collection of wanderings that cost him much labour.

⁶⁰ *The Catholic Times and Catholic Opinion*, 6th January 1911

⁶¹ "*Annales de Bretagne*", January 1901, p279 et seq

⁶² It is in Celtic phonetics chiefly that Mr Baring-Gould made use of his imagination and revealed his lack of rigour. He offered proof of his customary cleverness in *Family names and their story* (London, Seeley, 1909, in octavo of 432 p.). However, according to the "*Historical Review*", *this work* "adds much to what we knew, even though it is often open to challenge".

⁶³ *Bulletin Critique*, January 1901.p279 et seq

⁶⁴ Three hymns by Mr Baring-Gould are part of the *Prayer Book*; I cannot recall which ones, except for No 391: *Onward Christian soldiers...* (which seems to me to have been inspired by the French : *Let us march to combat and to glory*). In 1911, my host wrote a hymn for the coronation of George V and Queen Mary. The music was composed by M. Arscott who is the organist of the Church of Saint-Malo, at Dinan. Moreover, in the run up to this illustrious ceremony, the author had visited in 1910 the Duchy of Teck, the birthplace of the Queen. Hence his book *The Land of Teck*, of which a number of print runs were made in view of the Royal festivities (see *The Daily Graphic* edition of 16th June 1911, *Coronation Number*).

words are not to be found in the manuscripts deposited in the library of the City of Plymouth as our folklorist in his edition has replaced verses considered vulgar with a version more to his taste. Finally, those who draw up the history of the Church of England will not be able to omit his large volume which appeared in March 1914 entitled *The Church Revival. Thoughts thereon and Reminiscences*.

In this last publication which is a collection of personal memories and an Anglican apologia, a book of history and of polemic, a satire and a sermon, one is aware of the novelist, a spirit of unfettered enquiry and of the devoted priest before his altar. When I speak of "free spirit" be it understood once and for all to mean "within the boundaries of good sense and the good life that he considers as an Englishman one must not cross". I was not able to talk about George Eliot with him. "She is a whore", he replied. It is nevertheless impossible for me to believe that he had not read *Scenes of Clerical Life*. One can judge the writer by *The Church Revival*. He cultivates imagery and metaphor, allusion and quotation, the stinging phrase, witty remarks and humour. One would perhaps think that he wanted to create, as people of former times might have said, a *promptuarium acute lepedique dictorum*⁶⁵; but too much is too much. His information, as is his custom, is more widespread than solidly based. And for us, the French, the book of this old man with the rapid gait contains some boring passages. Even so, for an octogenarian to undertake so cheerfully such a labour is a spectacle worthy of envy. The final page is as follows:

In the service of the State, it is those of mediocre worth who receive the important posts, because mediocrity offers safety. It is the same in the Church. The man of real ability is set aside because of his very capability and because he has ideas of his own ... But the workers of Great Britain despise these people of mediocre ability. One day, a merchant offers a horse to an intending buyer. "Can you guarantee to me" says the buyer, "that he will not try to run away?" – Sir, he won't budge from the shafts. You have to hit him to make him go – But won't he kick out? – Kick out? He has too thin a rump to get frisky – Are you trying to hide the fact that he shies? – No, he is blind. – Then he is not safe? – Oh yes, he is safe, absolutely safe. He is a wooden horse! I didn't want to take any risks myself, nor with my silver harness on another beast. Reserve the best stall in your stable for him."

This will probably explain to you why Mr Baring-Gould has remained the squarson⁶⁶ of a village and has not even received a "stall" in an English cathedral. It speaks well of his pride. And La Bruyère said "What need does Trophimeⁱ have to be a Cardinal?" Indeed! But the College of Cardinals has need of Trophime. Ecclesiastical decorations would not be an object of jokes

⁶⁵ Collection of chosen pieces.

⁶⁶ Squire and parson

– and of contempt for those who knew what the fiddle was worth - if they were not normally worn by those who lack ability and those who scheme.

Ron Wawman adds:

The translation of the quotation from The Church Revival provides an unusual opportunity to judge the quality of the translation of both the English to French by l'abbé Duine and from French to English by Alan Payne. By comparing Alan Payne's translation with Sabine's original text below we can see that they both come through this version of Chinese whispers very well. The words used have often changed but the meaning is broadly preserved.

In the service of the State it is the mediocrities who are given places of importance, because they are safe men. And it is doubly so in the Church. The really able man is set aside, because he is able, and has ideas of his own.....

.....But such men as these the British working man despises. A dealer brought a horse to a would-be purchaser. "You will guarantee that he does not run away?" "Sir, he will stand stock-still in the shafts. You must push him to make him go." "And he does not kick?" "Kick, sir! He is so stiff in the back he cannot raise his hindquarters." "And he does not shy ? " "He is stone-blind." "And he is safe?" "Safe! Absolutely. Why, he's a wooden horse." "That is the beast for me and my silver-mounted harness. Take him round to the stables and give him the best stall."

Endnote:

ⁱ Trophime: Saint Trophimus c. 230 AD (otherwise known as Trophime) was the first bishop of Arles. He has at times been confused with the Trophimus who accompanied Paul and is mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles* 20:4. Sabine wrote about Saint Trophimus in *Lives of the Saints* and commented on the confusion in *Troubadour Land* 1892, chapter 6. The possible connection of Trophime to the College of Cardinals is unclear.