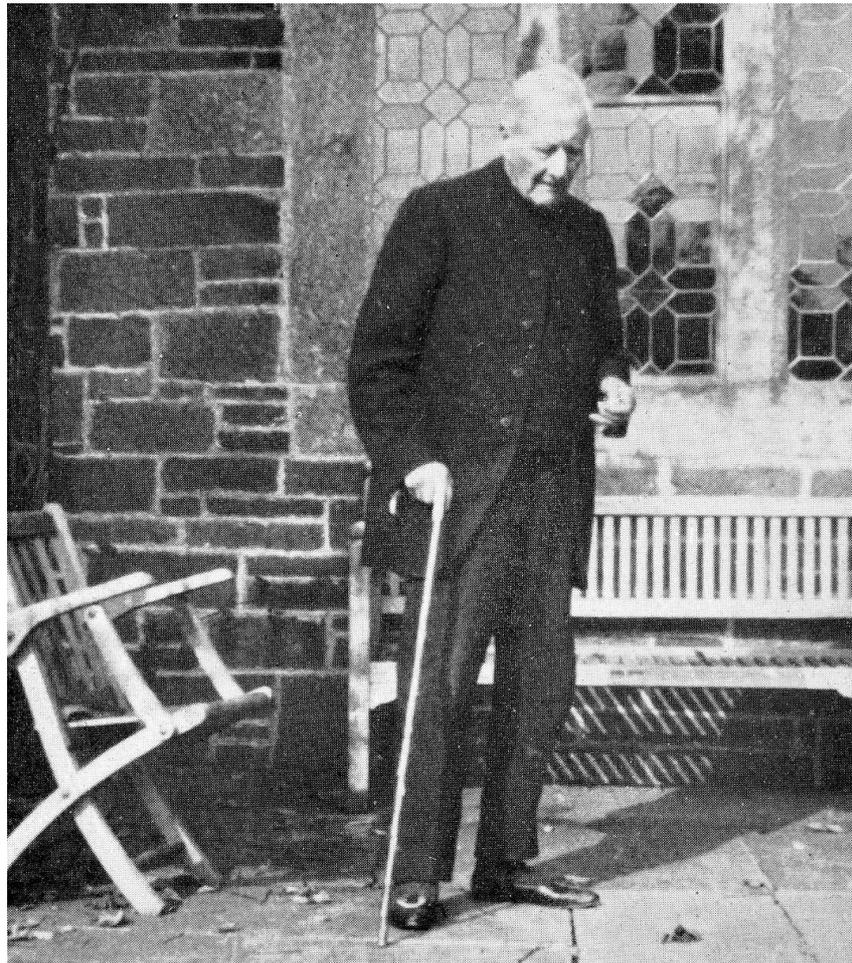


**The Last Thirty Years  
of  
The Life of Sabine Baring-Gould  
as revealed by  
Correspondence with Others**

**Part III  
Sabine's Last Thirty Years.  
An Overview**

## **Sabine's Last Thirty Years, An Overview**



**By Ronald Wawman © February 2011**

## Sabine's Last Thirty Years An Overview

### Introduction

Part III of *The Last Thirty Years of the Life of Sabine Baring-Gould as revealed by Correspondence with Others* is an overview that draws extensively on three collections of letters written by Sabine. One collection of some 111 letters sent to his daughter Mary over the 30 years 1893 to 1923<sup>1</sup> is the subject of Part I. Another collection of 76 letters sent to Miss Evelyn Healey over the 7 years October 1917 to December 1923<sup>2</sup> is the subject of Part II.

A small collection of 9 letters was written to the Rev I K Anderson between May 1911 and November 1923.<sup>3</sup> This collection together with the manuscript memoirs of Sabine's daughter, Joan Priestley<sup>4</sup> will be published in due course. Reference is also made to the Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould<sup>5</sup> as well as letters to, Sabine's son Edward, the wife of the Rev. Anderson, Charles Head and John Quick.

The two larger collections are featured in two existing biographies, one by Bickford H C Dickinson<sup>6</sup> and one by Harold Kirk-Smith.<sup>7</sup> As new information has become available some of the conclusions made in those biographies need to be reappraised.

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

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

Sabine's second volume of *Reminiscences* ended in the year 1894. Therefore his last years turned out to be almost exactly his last 30 years, i.e. from 1895 to 1923. Sadly the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of *Reminiscences* was never published, for reasons explored in this paper, but, by coincidence, Mary's collection of letters, beginning as it does in 1893 and ending a few months before his death, neatly covers that period.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Baring-Gould S, letters to Mary Dickinson, Held at Devon Record Office, owned by Dickinson E.

<sup>2</sup> Baring-Gould S, letters to Evelyn Healey, Held at Alder, Lewdown, owned by Almond M.

<sup>3</sup> Baring-Gould S, letters to I K Anderson. Held at the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office. Ref 470/4. Transcribed by Graebe M.

<sup>4</sup> Priestley Joan. Notebook Memoirs. Held at the Devon Record Office. Owned by Bickinson E.

<sup>5</sup> Wawman, R. *Never Completely Submerged; The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, 2009, Grosvenor House Publishing.

<sup>6</sup> Dickinson BHC, *Sabine Baring-Gould, Squarson, Writer and Folklorist*, 1970, Newton Abbot, David and Charles.

<sup>7</sup> Kirk-Smith H, *Now The Day Is Over*, 1997, Boston, Richard Kay.

This change is well illustrated by a quotation from the biography written by Bickford Dickinson:<sup>8</sup>

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

### Suppression of Primary Source Material

The story begins with another quotation from Bickford Dickinson's biography:<sup>9</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

But what did happen to the missing manuscript of the third volume of Reminiscences - or to an early typed version, the existence of which is implied in Sabine's letter to Evelyn Healey of 19 October 1921?

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<sup>8</sup> Dickinson BHC, *Sabine Baring-Gould*, p 173.

<sup>9</sup> Dickinson BHC, *Sabine Baring-Gould*, pp 172-3.

Bickford Dickinson wrote:<sup>10</sup>

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

Keith Lister in his biography<sup>11</sup> quoted the following statement by Sabine's son, Edward, published in the *Evening Echo* dated 5 February 1934:

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

So, that is that – or is it?

In recent years, when discussing Sabine's last years, Merriol Almond informed the author that Edward's daughter, Adele, had witnessed her father burning the manuscript. Edward's explanation at the time was that he thought the contents would be offensive to the church hierarchy.

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

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

*These letters should on no account become public without careful re-reading by a member of the family.*

*I have given away a number to relatives and have destroyed a few very personal ones.*

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

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

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<sup>10</sup> Dickinson BHC, *Sabine Baring-Gould*, p 72.

<sup>11</sup> Lister K, *'Half My Life' The Story of Sabine Baring-Gould and Grace*, 2002, Horbury, Charnwood, pp 125-6.

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

Harold Kirk-Smith, in his biography, quoted from what he described as a collection of 72 letters from Sabine to Miss Evelyn Healey.<sup>12</sup> He described Miss Healey as a friend of the Baring-Gould family and he worked from transcriptions he convinced himself had been made locally. This description was misleading, however, and resulted in a great deal of confusion when, in 2004, Merriol Almond purchased a collection of letters from Professor Peter Dickinson.<sup>13</sup> When these were examined on her behalf, they turned out to be a transcription of the very same 76 (not 72) letters to Evelyn Healey but with the added bonus of 36 of the original manuscript letters. It was eventually possible to establish that both collections came from a certain Mrs Olwen Peck, who was a cousin of Professor Dickinson's wife. In 1988, Mrs Peck, before her death, had passed to Professor Dickinson's wife the top copy of a typed transcription of 76 letters together with the 36 manuscript letters and some other unrelated material. What Kirk-Smith had access to was merely the carbon copy of the letters that had been purchased directly from Mrs Peck around 1986. Unfortunately no one now alive is able to say how the letters and transcriptions came to be in the possession of Mrs Peck, or what her relationship might have been to Miss Healey.

Kirk-Smith was, as will be seen, in error when he described Miss Healey as *a friend of the family*.<sup>14</sup> As yet nothing more is known about Miss Healey apart from the fact that she sold four manuscript copies of Sabine's hymns at Sotheby's in 1934<sup>15</sup> and was still alive in 1956. The correspondence confirms that Sabine gave the manuscript copies of his hymns to Miss Healey on different occasions and at her request. Miss Healey's age at the time of the correspondence is not known but from the content of the letters it can be deduced that her birthday was probably 12 February and she might have been born in 1891, although there is no firm evidence for this.

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

However, had he done so he would have failed to discover that Evelyn, in her transcription, had deliberately censored out what she must have concluded were potentially sensitive passages in the letters. No reason for this censorship presents itself apart from the possibility that Evelyn perhaps had her own thoughts of publication and was concerned not to cause offence to the Baring-Gould family. Be that as it may, these censored passages do give some inkling of why some members of the family might have thought it best to prudently draw a veil over aspects of Sabine's last years.

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<sup>12</sup> Kirk-Smith H, *Now the Day is over*, p 233.

<sup>13</sup> Professor Peter Dickinson is not related to Mary Dickinson or her descendants.

<sup>14</sup> Kirk-Smith H, *Now The Day Is Over*, p 233.

<sup>15</sup> Bristow R, personal communication. These copies of Sabine's hymns are now held at Exeter Cathedral library.

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

### **The Buoyant Years: 1893 to 1913**

Before turning to Sabine's final troubled years, an overview of Sabine's life as revealed in earlier letters to Mary will help to put the troubled nature of the later correspondence in context.

The first letter to Mary was written on 17 January 1893 just 6 days after her marriage to Harvey Dickinson. It is an unusually emotional and affectionate letter that begins *My own darling Mary*. Similar unusually warm letters were written on the birth of Mary's first child later that year and again in 1911 when Mary had surgery for what proved to be a benign tumour. Otherwise the letters, while mostly warm and cheerful, and usually beginning *My dear Mary*, are businesslike in that, more often than not, the principle reason for writing was for such purposes as enclosing a quarterly cheque, thanking her for gifts or best wishes, giving, or responding to invitations to visit, or, not infrequently, asking her to do something for him. Thus when Mary was living near Plymouth and later in London, Sabine would often ask her to visit agents and find such servants as a cook or a butler or, when there was illness in the house, a nurse. When Mary was living at Bude he would ask her to find lodgings for convalescent members of his household.

Fortunately, more often than not, Sabine then proceeded to use the letters as vehicles for passing on news, be this news of what other members of the family were doing, details of his trips to the continent or references to visitors to Lew House. Often he gave Mary news of illness whether in himself, in members of the household or in the parish.

The letters are full of significant family information. The only drawback is that for most of the time the surviving letters are infrequent and do no more than give a hazy snapshot at a particular moment in time. Sometimes, particularly in the 1890s, Sabine wrote a succession of letters covering one subject. Thus he wrote a series of troubled letters around the time of a devastating influenza outbreak in 1894 which caused the death of his butler, laid low many members of the household and had a markedly adverse effect on the morale of both Sabine and his wife Grace. The production of *Red Spider*, the comic opera, in 1898, led to a similar series of letters, but this time full of excitement and joy. During the 1890s Sabine averaged about one letter a month, while in later years the rate of surviving letters declined to two or three letters a year.

Sometimes Sabine described the activities of Grace. The correspondence is remarkable for the frequency with which he gave news of various family members. Over the years every family member was mentioned several times. This has, for

example, thrown particular light on the meticulous care that Sabine took over the employment placements of his sons Julian, Harry and Willy to enable them to gain practical experience in various aspects of engineering. Thus Julian was placed with a mining firm to prepare himself for the sort of work he was likely to encounter in Sarawak.

Sabine seems at times to have despaired of Harry, but, however firm and uncaring he may have seemed to others, he never ceased in his efforts to do what he thought most likely to help Harry. In a letter written in 1902 to his eldest son, Edward,<sup>16</sup> the main purpose of which was to congratulate Edward on the birth of a son and heir, Sabine expressed his thoughts to Edward on four of his other children including Harry:

*I am taking Harry away from Winchester at Easter, he is doing nothing there, and I shall apprentice him at a foundry in Plymouth I think to make him work with his hands as he will not with his head, but he must also attend to technical education classes in the evening if he is to get on. He is so inert, and shows so little disposition for any particular line of work, that it is disheartening.*

Then on 31 March 1903 he wrote the following to Mary:

*Harry who has gone through hard times. He has to sit in the kitchen and has no room to himself. Even his bedroom is not his own for the man and his boy also sleep in it. I have told him to shift to Erith where he can have lodgings to himself. It will cost me about 15/- a week but I cannot let him be so uncomfortable. He has borne it gallantly, and without complaint – devoured by fleas and it has done him good. He has learned to know and to be able to be on a footing with the British working man, and that is an asset for life. And he has admitted to Alex Baring that he had thrown away his chances and must do his best to revive them.*

What is also very clear is that Sabine greatly approved of any of his children when they were being industrious and responsible. He disliked frivolity and indolence. It is this attitude to industry and idleness that has led some observers to suggest that he had favourites.

Some of his children, notably Felicitas and Barbara, appear to have moved in and out of their father's approval for these reasons. The entry in his diary for 10 November 1899 took the form of a draft letter to Barbara's future husband, Laurence Burnard, in which he gave his opinion that Barbara, then aged 19, was not ready for marriage. He wrote:

*... Now B. is really in her ways and mind so much of a child still that I think it very advisable, in so important a matter, that she should not engage herself, till she has had time to decide whether she is in earnest or not. She is such a butterfly that is thoughtless when to alight...*

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<sup>16</sup> Baring-Gould, S. Letter to E S Baring-Gould, 16 January 1902. Owned and held by Almond M.

However some two years later on 16 January 1902, Sabine wrote the following in the letter to his son, Edward:

*Barbara has been however greatly improved by her marriage. Her expression from being supercilious is changed, and she looks sweet. She has turned into an exemplary house-keeper as particular as her mother about all being kept nice and orderly, and keeps accounts in a most praiseworthy manner and is very particular about balancing them.*

In a letter to Mary on 2 December 1902 Sabine enthusiastically copied a letter from Felicitas that included a graphic description of her work as a trainee nurse in London. He concluded:

*I am so thankful that Felicitas has taken up useful work, it will do her all the good in the world.*

Subsequent letters to Mary expressed disappointment at what Sabine regarded as her lack of application and frivolous behaviour. Thus on 30 December 1909 he wrote:

*I am not a little worried that Felicitas has had notice to quit her situation on 27. January. She has been having words with Miss Grieg the housekeeper who doubtless has found fault with her gadding about going to dances and neglecting her duty. Of course F. can not see that she is at fault.*

Sabine's correspondence with Mary in the late 1890s is notable for references to two major restoration projects in Lew House. The first being the creation in 1894-5 of new kitchens as part of an extensive rebuild of the East wing together with the building of a brand new North wing with its beautiful cloisters. The second was the rebuild of the West wing in 1897 leading to the creation of a magnificent ballroom. This was rapidly followed in 1898 by his promotion of the extravagant production of Sabine's *Red Spider, the Comic Opera*. Although well supported in the West Country, the provincial tour, despite over 100 performances, never quite fulfilled its promise. The extent of the losses on this production are not known but must have been sizeable. Presumably they were borne by Sabine and his fellow promoter, the composer, Learmont Drydale. In late 1900, Sabine closed up Lew House and took the family off to Dinan for just over a year. Both Joan Priestley and Bickford Dickinson attribute this move to Sabine's efforts to avoid bankruptcy. It seems likely that the debts Sabine had accumulated from the restoration of Lew House had been embarrassingly compounded by the losses incurred by *Red Spider*. The ebullience of Sabine's early letters never quite returned after 1898. There are no surviving letters to Mary from 1899.

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

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

The following passage in the handwritten biographical notes of Sabine's daughter Joan<sup>17</sup> gives an amusing twist to this account:

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

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

There are only two letters from Grace to Mary in this collection. Sabine's remarks in a letter written on 19 April 1895 suggest a possible reason for Grace's reluctance to put pen to paper:

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

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

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

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

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<sup>17</sup> Priestley J, Notebook Memoirs.

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

There were three possible reasons for taking Grace, and at times other members of the family, on these excursions. Firstly, now that the children were getting older, it was easier for Grace to get away with her husband. Secondly, as evidenced in a letter written on 1 October 1909, Sabine had become realistically fearful of falling ill when abroad and was reassured by Grace's presence. Thirdly, in two letters to Mary and one to a parishioner,<sup>18</sup> Sabine wrote along the lines that Grace, when she was on the continent, thought nothing of walking 2 or 3 miles, while at home he could not get her to walk as far as the greenhouses. These entries are the only available indications of the increasingly severe arthritis that had afflicted Grace. They also suggest that Sabine had difficulty getting her to take exercise when at Lew. In December 1913 Sabine travelled to Pau accompanied on that occasion by his friend Gatrill rather than Grace, who it can be assumed was probably too crippled to travel comfortably and was being looked after by his daughter, Cicely. This was to be Sabine's last visit to the continent.

## The Troubled Years

In July 1914, just 7 months after the visit to Pau with Gatrill, Sabine wrote to Mary asking her if she would visit Miss Biggs, the children's old governess, who was ill, because *I cannot leave Mama so crippled*. It is also evident from a brief if anguished comment in this letter that, not long before, Sabine and Grace had visited Bath so that Grace could take the waters. Sadly the visit had been of no benefit.

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

Then on 23 March 1916 Sabine wrote the following:

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

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

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

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<sup>18</sup> Baring-Gould S. Letter to Polly Davey (a parishioner) 1906 Mar 8. Owned by Matthews C.

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

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

The query about Arscott and Edward reflected the anxiety which had entered Sabine's correspondence during Grace's last illness and which, in correspondence over the next year or so, seemed to have been transferred to his son John, son-in-law Charles and grandsons Edward and Arscott. Almost immediately a letter expressed concern that Arscott was in hospital with diphtheria. It was to be 5 months before Sabine was able to express his relief that Arscott was out of hospital. Meanwhile Sabine had become desperate for news of his grandson Edward who had been shot in the neck. Then in January 1917 Sabine expressed relief at news that Charles Calmady-Hamlyn had not been injured, as he had feared. The same letter also informed Mary that her brother, John, was now attached to the Royal Flying Corps.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whatever the reason for this correspondence Sabine would seem to have entered into it enthusiastically and had soon told Evelyn about an 8 week bout of bronchitis, invited her to lunch should she come that way again, and described the horrific

gunshot wounds his son John had suffered flying over France. At Christmas he responded to her seasonal greetings while in January he thanked her for sending him birthday greetings. Then, at her request he sent the first manuscript copy of one of his hymns.

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

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

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

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

The date on which Sabine's son, Edward came home from the Middle East is uncertain but it is evident from a letter written to Mary on 24 March 1919 that Edward had lost no time acquainting himself with the financial affairs of the estate:

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

An entry in the family bible<sup>19</sup> for the year 1919 included the statement:

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

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

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

This letter contains the first example of censorship by Miss Healey. The phrase *and was being robbed by my servants* had been removed in her transcription.

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<sup>19</sup> Wawman R, *Never Completely Submerged, The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, includes a transcription of the Family Bible entries. p 218.

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

It has long been widely accepted that Sabine never recovered from the death of Grace and was neglecting himself. Alcohol misuse is a common feature of a pathological bereavement reaction in the elderly. Sabine was probably depressed and drinking inappropriately in a vain attempt to achieve sleep and to escape from the loneliness and the mental torment that followed his loss. His distress would have been aggravated by the anxieties thrown up by a family deeply involved in the war. The severity of the bereavement reaction is borne out in the memoirs of his daughter Joan<sup>20</sup> who wrote:

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

It is necessary to try and understand exactly how it was that Marian and Edward came to move into Lew House and to consider the problems this may have created both for them and for Sabine.

Edward was, without doubt, the financial expert of the family. In Sabine's diary<sup>21</sup> there is a delightful and amusing account illustrating Edward's thrift at the Freiburg fair at the age of 10:

*1880 16 Nov:*

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

<sup>20</sup> Priestley J. Notebook memoirs.

<sup>21</sup> Wawman R, *Never Completely Submerged, The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, p 73.

*1880 17 Nov:*

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

*1880 18 Nov:*

*At the fair again Edward has spent the 50 pf. Mary gave him in purchasing a box of bricks as a present for her.*

9 years later in October 1889, at the age of 18, Edward had left Lew to work with a firm of financiers in America.<sup>22</sup> On that day Sabine wrote the following ambivalent comment in his diary:

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

Eventually, following his return from the States, Edward had set up a very successful cosmetics business the management of which was disrupted by his service in the army during the war.

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

It is possible that other members of the family lost no time entreating Edward, as Sabine's heir, to 'do something' about the situation at Lew now that he was home. Although Edward probably disapproved of the extent of his father's drinking and was unlikely to understand what lay behind it, he must have felt impelled to do what he could to see that Sabine was properly cared for and the finances of the estate put in order, before urgently turning his attention to London and his business. It is not difficult to imagine him impatiently going through the books with Sabine and firmly recommending certain actions.

Advising his father to sell off some of the properties on the estate and invest the proceeds abroad. Persuading his father to renegotiate the tenancy agreements so that in future tenants would be responsible for their own repairs.<sup>23</sup> Telling his father to make his will.

<sup>22</sup> Wawman R, *Never Completely Submerged, The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, p 172.

<sup>23</sup> Baring-Gould S, letter to Mary Dickinson, 19 March 1923.

Finally, having seen how uncertain Sabine's care had been, he pressed his father to hand over the management of the house and estate to himself and his wife Marian. It does not seem to have occurred to Edward that, with his ongoing absence on business in London, the onus would largely fall on Marian. It is evident from letters, entries in the family bible<sup>24</sup> and a will drawn up in 1920 that Sabine agreed to all that Edward wanted to do.

It is possible that Edward gave his father conditional financial support, although the author knows of no evidence for this. Nor is there evidence that the tenancy agreements were changed, probably because Edward found this to be impractical. However, as will be seen, Sabine continued to believe that these changes had happened and he therefore paid out for extensive repairs to properties on the estate in preparation for them.

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

On 18 July 1921 he wrote to the Rev Anderson:

*I am stone broke. Ever since the war ended I have had to put all my farms and cottages in repair, for fresh leases so that thenceforth the tenants will be responsible. This is all very well for my successors, but it is inimical to me. My son will come into the property without having to pay for repairs – all that has fallen and is falling on me, and I get no advantage from it..... I am simply now a paying guest in my own house.<sup>25</sup>*

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

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

<sup>24</sup> Wawman R, *Never Completely Submerged, The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, p 218.

<sup>25</sup> The last phrase of this letter had been crossed out but was nevertheless just legible.

Mary, who was of her own generation, would be on hand to help make her welcome and feel at home.<sup>26</sup>

Some years later when Edward had returned to England on a permanent basis, he and Marian became the first tenants of the new Rectory that Sabine had built in 1906 and it was at the Rectory that Marian spent the war years with their three children, whose ages in 1914 would have been 8, 9 and 12 years. Neither Marian, nor her children, feature in Sabine's letters to Mary during the war years. It is not known how Marian coped at that time or what support she had from parishioners or other members of the Baring-Gould family.

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

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

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

The first inkling that all might not have been well at Lew House is to be found, not in the letters but in the entries in the family bible for 1920 and 1921.<sup>27</sup> The first simply stated that Sabine had given two religious paintings away – one to Tavistock Church, the other to Buckfast Abbey. The second told of two more paintings being given to Lewtrenchard Church, but this time with the comment:

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

<sup>26</sup> Baring-Gould S, Letter to daughter Mary, 17 January 1897.

<sup>27</sup> Wawman R, *Never Completely Submerged, The Diary of Sabine-Baring-Gould*, p 218.

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

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

The possibility that Marian was uneasy in Lew House is supported by a puzzling piece of information provided by Merriol Almond. At some point Marian came to regard Sabine as a menacing figure and for this reason had placed a crucifix in Merriol's father's bedroom to protect him from any threat. In the absence of further information no simple explanation suggests itself for this behaviour and it is only possible to suggest that it reflected the unhappy and troubled state of Marian's mind.

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

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

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

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

On Christmas Eve 1921 came the only less than equable letter to Mary in the whole of Sabine's surviving correspondence with her. It somehow escaped Bickford Dickinson's censorship. It started amicably enough but eventually Sabine's irritation burst through:

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

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

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

This was Sabine's only reference to Marian as Edward's *wife*, rather than by her name, in his surviving correspondence with Mary. It was also the only reference to

Edward as *B.G.* ie – the BG, or head of the Baring-Gould family. In one angry letter to Evelyn, Sabine described Marian as *Mrs. E*, although usually she was referred to as *my daughter in law*, or, when he was particularly angry, *my American daughter in law*.

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

Sabine was clearly determined that he would not be abandoned at Christmas again and he did spend the following Christmas, 1922, with Aunt Kate. It seems likely that he wrote several people telling them what a splendid time he had.<sup>28 29 30</sup> In his unpublished book, *The Growth of Religious Conviction*<sup>31</sup> he gave a graphic description of the service he attended in Exeter Cathedral on Christmas Day and how deeply his emotions were affected by this.

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

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

*I must thank you most cordially for your kind good wishes on my birthday. I am glad to hear that your mother is keeping well. I get into Tavistock now very rarely and when I do it is in my son's motor. And he and his wife are always in a hurry to get home so that there is no chance of getting out to see you.*<sup>32</sup>

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

*I am so distressed to hear of your illness. Yesterday as my son had to return to town he motored early to Okehampton and allowed me to go with him and to return by Blackdown. I stopped the car at the inn and went down to the Rectory, and had a great shock at seeing the blinds down. I returned up the hill to the car and learned from the taverner that you were ill and in the village. I would have gone down to see you, but that my da-in-law was in the car and was impatient to get on..... I cannot use my son's car. It is never*

<sup>28</sup> Baring-Gould S, letter to Evelyn Healey dated 24 December 1922.

<sup>29</sup> Baring-Gould S, letter to Mary Dickinson dated 22 December 1922.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to Hilda Piper (a parishioner) dated 22 December 1922, Held at Devon Record Office, Owned by Almond M.

<sup>31</sup> Baring-Gould S. *The Growth of Religious Conviction*, unpublished. Held by DRO. Owned by Almond M.

<sup>32</sup> Baring-Gould S, letter to Mr John Quick. Held at Lewtrenchard Manor Hotel. Owned by Almond M.

*offered to one, and I only have my old cob and a low four-wheeler for going about parishing, but it would not do for a long drive to Mary Tavy. I wish it were.*

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

*I wish I could get over to see you. But if I took train to M.T.[Mary Tavy] Station I could not walk so far as the church and its neighbouring cottage. My walking powers are reduced to hobbling round the garden with a stick. How I look back upon and think ever of the happy days that we spent together in Wales and on Whittor!<sup>33</sup> I have not set foot on Dartmoor now for 5 years and I doubt if I shall again. Ah! the days of old! But one looks forward to what will be. I do so most earnestly....*

In a sad letter written on 16 February 1923 to Charles Head,<sup>34</sup> who had restored portraits at Lew House, Sabine summed up his distress and unhappiness at this time:

*Dear Mr Head*

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>33</sup> Whittor, Dartmoor: Also known as White Tor, Whit Tor or Peter Tor. See Sabine's *The Book of Dartmoor*, pp 97-102. Whit Tor planned by Anderson.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Head: Shacklock D, ed SBGAS Newsletter, No.10, Oct 1992, p 2.

*had learned that I am too old and tottery to be frisking about the country, at all events alone.*

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

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

On 27 April 1922 he wrote the following:

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

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

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

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

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

On 26 May he wrote in a letter beginning *My very dear Evelyn*:

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

*I have been unwell all this last three weeks. Really I ought not to have been turned out of my house when only just recovering from bronchitis. But I am*

*better today, and was so yesterday when the warm weather returned. I go home next Wednesday, and shall never again I trust quit Lew till the Day of Judgement.*

Aside from the emotional bond that was clearly developing between Sabine and Evelyn this letter gave a worrying glimpse of problems at Lew. Why was Sabine turned out of his home when he was patently unwell? Why did he not refuse to budge?

It is possible that Marian simply did not know how to handle Sabine. Was she perhaps obsessively house proud? Was the disruptive spring-cleaning at Lew what she was accustomed to doing at previous dwellings? Could it be that she was barely able to conquer her fears of her father in law and, having eventually done so, could not contemplate any change to her plans. Perhaps Sabine was only too well aware of her vulnerability and, apart from grumbling, was reluctant to cause further distress by refusing to move.

Sadly this same performance was to be repeated in the year 1923. On this occasion however Sabine had already persuaded Evelyn Healey, who was planning another visit to Devon, to stay at Lewdown, rather than Staverton, in South Devon, as she originally intended, and take lodging at the *Blue Lion* inn. However, Marian decided to carry out her annual spring clean of Lew House over the same dates. It is tempting to speculate on the possibility that Marian had some pre-knowledge, through servants, of Sabine's plans. There is a suggestion of juggling and counter-juggling with dates. Sabine's eventual response to the frustration of his plans was the following explosion of fury written on 31 May 1923 – part of which, shown in bold, was edited out of Evelyn Healey's transcription:

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

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

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

As it happened Evelyn was able to adjust her dates sufficiently so that, at the end of her holiday, she could enjoy a trip to Exeter with Sabine for lunch at the Royal Clarence followed by a choral service at the cathedral. It is of interest to note, knowing how tongues are inclined to wag at Lew, that he and Evelyn were prudently accompanied by a young parishioner, Edith Martin, who was about to enter on a nursing career. She lived to be over 100 and only died around the year 2000.

To celebrate Evelyn's birthday on 12 February 1923, Sabine arranged with his publishers for a copy of his novel *The Queen of Love*<sup>35</sup> to be sent to her.

It is tempting to speculate on what might have persuaded Sabine to choose this particular novel as a birthday present rather than any other book? The novel does indeed have many *droll situations*, as he told Evelyn,<sup>36</sup> but the overall impression on the author of this paper is of tragic situations, intriguing studies of particular relationships and the stark portrayal of characters – some of whom are decidedly unpleasant. The relationship between Jabez Grice and his son, Andrew, summed up in the final chapter, chimes with Sabine's conclusions on his relationship with his own father. There is also an amusing vignette in which an older man, Poles, makes a fool of himself with a younger girl but it seems unlikely that Sabine would have wanted to draw attention to that! It is perhaps more profitable to look at Sabine's situation at Lew House at the time the letter was written and to see that there are parallels between the humiliating submission of hard man, 'Hammer' Grice to his daughter-in-law, *Ada Button* and Sabine's relationship with Marian at Lew.

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

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

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

Evelyn had been learning to type and, on 1 September, Sabine commented favourably on a letter typed by her. Then on 27 September he asked if she could recommend a professional typist to help him with a religious book on which he was working.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Baring-Gould S. *The Queen of Love*, 1894, London, Methuen.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Evelyn Healey IL, 8 February 1923.

<sup>37</sup> There is no publication in the bibliography relating to the book on which Sabine was working with Evelyn's help during the last few months of his life. It was probably never completed and was not published after his death. In box 13 of the Baring-Gould deposit box 5203 at the DRO are the following typescript chapters of an unpublished book *The Growth of Religious Convictions*: chapter 2: Miracles; chapter 3: Paulinism (3 typescripts) ; chapter 4: Paulinism & Calvinism; chapter 5: Paulinism & Lutheranism; chapter 6: The atonement; chapter 7: Eschatology; chapter 8: Papalism; chapter 9: Modernism; chapter 10: Present and Future. Unfortunately chapter 1: The Church, is missing but the presence of a chapter on *Paulinism*, mentioned in a letter written on 12 October 1923, confirms that this was the book on which he was working.

Evelyn volunteered herself for this task. At first he refused to accept her offer before eventually agreeing on condition she allowed him to pay her the going rate.

Over the next few weeks he sent her chapters, one of which was on *Paulinism*, got in a muddle over what he had sent and wrote apologetically of confusion and poor memory. The mention of a chapter on Paulinism confirms that the book on which he was working was *The Growth of Religious Conviction*. The typescript of chapters II to X of this book are held at the Devon Record Office. Chapter I is missing. The surviving chapters indicate that this was a scholastic work of some merit, full of relevant anecdotes, challenging ideas and arguments but nevertheless easy to read. It is evident from references, in chapter X, to events in December 1922 and February 1923 that Sabine was actively writing this book in the last two years of his life. This strongly supports the author's view that, until the last few weeks of his life, Sabine's mental state was sound, with no evidence of dementia.

Sabine was pleased with Evelyn's first efforts but, sadly, it did not get much further than that. On 1 November he wrote that he was greatly alarmed to hear that she was ill with pleurisy. Letters over the following few weeks include reports of his confusion and forgetfulness together. There were also expressions of concern for Evelyn's health coupled with the information that he was praying for her daily.

On 26 November Sabine wrote:

*I do hope that you are on the mend.  
Please to return to me the chapter or chapters I sent to you to be retyped. I am very ill and feel as though I were failing altogether. I can not recall any thing about the M.S. scrap to which you allude, but for the last fortnight I have been so incapable of remembering anything.*

Meanwhile on 22 November he had written to the Rev. Anderson's wife:

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

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

*With the tenderest sympathy*

On 30 November 1923, Sabine wrote on a postcard to Evelyn Healey:

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

The final message to Evelyn, also on another postcard, came on 13 December:

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

Sabine died just 20 days later on 2 January 1924.

## Some Conclusions

Although, on 1 September 1922, Sabine had told Evelyn he was busy making changes to *Early Reminiscences* at the request of his publishers and on 21 March 1923 had written that he was busy correcting the proof of that volume of his Reminiscences, at no point in their correspondence did he tell her that he was actively working on the missing third volume of his memoirs. Nor was the third volume ever mentioned in the surviving letters to Mary. It is theoretically possible that, after writing his last letter to Evelyn and realising, as he probably did, that he was close to death, Sabine had started to update his typed version of the third volume and was working on this when he died as suggested by Dickinson, but taking into account his difficulties with *The Growth of Religious Conviction* for which Evelyn's services had been engaged, this seems improbable. It is however evident from Sabine's last surviving letter to Mary on 10 September 1923 that, during his last few months, he was undoubtedly working on the chapter on Grace, intended for, but missing from, *Further Reminiscences*.

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

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

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

There is no reason to disagree with Bickford Dickinson's conclusion that Sabine was sad and lonely – desperately lonely, as Marian probably was also. But Sabine was not, as Dickinson concluded, *by nature a solitary man*.<sup>38</sup> Undoubtedly he was self confident enough to value and use solitude in his work, but he needed and regularly sought close social contact throughout his life. This presumably is the main reason why, despite giving up preaching because of his frequent and prolonged loss of voice, he continued to *go parishing* and visit his parishioners until two months before his death.

Contrary to what is implied by Dickinson, the contents of the many letters written to Miss Healey in his last year do not indicate any loss of mental alertness, significant memory impairment or loss of emotional control until 1 November 1923. Mental confusion and impaired memory only became apparent as part of his final physical deterioration. There is nothing in the letters, at any time, to suggest a dementing process. If Sabine appeared at times to be unreasonable, there were others in the household also capable of unreasonableness, in the face of which Sabine grumbled helplessly, but would seem to have demonstrated remarkable forbearance.

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<sup>38</sup> Dickinson BHC, *Sabine Baring Gould*, p 157.

The author is left feeling a great sadness for Sabine, for Marian and also for Edward whose pre-occupations, impatience and absence from Lew much of the time probably contributed to the unhappy situation there. It seems likely that during Sabine's last three years or so, relationships in Lew House were tense with Edward and Sabine on distant terms. Perhaps this explains Edward's claim<sup>39</sup> that he was ignored by his father, despite much evidence to suggest that, in happier times, Edward occupied a very special place in Sabine's affections. Edward's claim indicates a defensive need to justify a distant and impatient attitude towards his elderly, unhappy and physically incapacitated father. It is not surprising that after Marian's death in 1931 Edward seemed not to want to be reminded of anything to do with Sabine or Lew.

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

*When I take a resolve to do a thing I do it.*

Similarly, in her unpublished memoirs written in 1956, his daughter, Joan Priestley,<sup>40</sup> wrote:

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

On 1 April 1881, during the course of a stressful legal dispute, Sabine wrote in his diary:<sup>41</sup>

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

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

Towards the end, the contents of some letters<sup>42</sup> suggest a yearning for release from his unhappy existence through death:

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

However he intended to reveal to the public a somewhat different state of mind. Chapter VII, *Eschatology*, in Sabine's unpublished *The Growth of Religious Conviction* concluded, in a section entitled *Indian Summers*, with a more serene expression of reconciliation to his approaching death:

*I will express my feelings in a couple of stanzas:*

<sup>39</sup> Personal communication. Almond M.

<sup>40</sup> Priestley J, Notebook Memoirs.

<sup>41</sup> Wawman R, *Never Completely Submerged, The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, p 103.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Charles Head, 16 February 1923.

## LIFE'S RENEWAL

All hail to the copper and golden leaf,  
 All hail to the dwindling sun!  
 To the arrish field and the garnered sheaf,  
 To the season's labour done!  
 The frost has sharpened the morning's breath,  
 On the chilled herb hangs the tear.  
 For the summer is over; in cometh Death  
 Decease of the worn out year.  
     But the wheel of life will turn, will turn,  
     And what though fate seem cruel?  
     The sun that is shorn, shall again be born,  
     For in Death is life's renewal.

All hail to the leaf that is wrinkled and sere,  
 When the bud behind it swells.  
 Youth leaps from decay, and the short'ned day  
 Of the coming spring-tide tells.  
 And the ploughshare gleams, and the furrow steams  
 When the Earth has dealt her spoil,  
 And the winter's rain falls never in vain  
 It blesses the farmer's toil.  
     Oh! the wheel of life will turn, will turn,  
     And what though fate seem cruel?  
     The sun that is shorn, shall again be born,  
     For in Death is life's renewal.

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Ron Wawman February 2011