

Early Family Correspondence of Sabine Baring-Gould
A Transcription and Analysis of Letters In Box 25,
Deposit Box 5203, The Baring-Gould Archive, Devon Record Office
by Ron Wawman © February 2010

Introduction:

There are fifteen letters in a small collection of family correspondence held in box 25 of the Baring-Gould Archive at the Devon Record Office. Fourteen were written by Sabine to various family members. The fifteenth is a letter to Sabine from his father, Edward Baring-Gould.

All but one, partially dated and written to an unnamed and unidentifiable aunt, make significant contributions to our knowledge and understanding of Sabine's relationship with other family members and to our knowledge of his interests and aspirations. Recognition by family members of the importance of these letters could be the reason why they have survived while much other family correspondence has disappeared.

The four earliest letters, written in 1857 and 1858, were from Sabine to his mother. One of these gives important insights into the tense relationships between Sabine and his parents during the months between coming down from Clare College, Cambridge and taking up an appointment as assistant master with the Woodard Schools in Sussex. The others seem to be part of an ongoing and more relaxed correspondence with her about happenings at St John's Middle School, Hurstpierpoint, their literary interests, his own developing writing styles, family portraits and, most intriguingly, a reason for a newfound passion for Iceland.

A group of eight letters, written between 1865 and 1872, were from Sabine to his father. Two letters were written from Horbury. One of these, apart from defending his choice of vocation, is otherwise concerned with the building of the mission at Horbury Brig; the other is a carefully crafted epistle, written at a time when Sabine is known from his diary to have been very angry because he mistakenly believed his father had decided to leave the Lew Trenchard estate to his brother Willy. This letter is also notable for Sabine's attempt to deflect and disarm his father's accurate suspicions that he was contemplating marriage.

The other six letters to Sabine's father were written from Dalton and Mersea. In these he wrote about his literary work, and it is evident that he never ceased to tell his father what he was trying to achieve through his published writing, nor to send him copies of his published work.

The one fragment of a letter to Sabine from his father included a rather pompous critique of one of Sabine's books, it is not possible to tell which. The rest of the surviving part of this letter from father is important because it appears to be the first time father shared with Sabine his, presumably, recently formed intention of leaving the whole of the Lew Trenchard estate to Sabine provided he agreed to the renewal of the entail. In fact the settlement of the estate was not finalised until a mere eleven days before his father's unexpected death in 1872.

Much of the content of the remaining six of Sabine's letters to his father is to do with either his annuity from the estate or, once he learned he was to inherit, agreeing the

details of the entail settlement. Three of these letters were written around the time of the birth of Sabine's eldest son, Edward. They describe domestic arrangements generally, and Grace's pregnancy in particular, with a mixture of concern and humour.

Sabine has sometimes been criticised for the scant regard he appeared to give to his siblings in his published writing. It has become clear from the transcription of Sabine's diary and subsequent research that his brother Willy was a tragic figure, and that Sabine was much distressed by the change in Willy's behaviour and lovingly supported him during a long terminal illness. Several letters in this collection reveal distress and bewilderment over Willy's failure to respond to Sabine's fraternal approaches before he understood the reason.

The final letter in this collection, written by Sabine in 1892 to his sister Margaret, points to many problems in her life. Research suggests that Margaret's marriage to Theodore Marsh was indeed unfortunate, as Sabine reported in his diary, and that she had led a troubled life prior to her untimely death. It is to be doubted whether there was much that Sabine could have done to help her and it is wholly understandable that neither she nor Willy figure extensively in Sabine's published work. Beyond childhood and early adult life Sabine would have had difficulty finding anything positive to write about them.

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DRO08	1871-04-10	Sabine to father	East Mersea Rectory
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DRO13	1872 Early	Sabine to father	East Mersea Rectory
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DRO01: SBG to mother

Wednesday
 13 Ashley Place
 Victoria Road¹ [sic]
 Westminster
 1857²

The entry in 'The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould' for 12 Sept 1880 suggests this letter was probably written just before Easter 1857 (Easter Day was 12 April) and shortly before leaving S Barnabas Pimlico soon after Easter, at his father's insistence. This letter could well have been the trigger for his father's decision.

It has proved impossible to find the precise date on which Sabine came down from Cambridge having taken his degree, as the relevant records are missing from the Clare College archives, but the diary entry for 12 Sept 1880 suggests this could be around February 1857.

The address Ashley Place is close to the junction of Victoria Street and Vauxhall Bridge Road and has been verified as the residence of his great uncle, Colonel Edward Sabine. This was some ¾ mile from, and within easy walking distance of St Barnabas, Pimlico. The diary entry suggests his parents were unaware of his exact whereabouts and Sabine had used Colonel Sabine as a go-between.

My dearest Mama

I am very sorry that I have hurt you by that letter of mine but it is not enough to have been sure of one place and the day almost fixed when I was to have gone and all my hopes built up on it, then to have it suddenly cut away from under me, then to have distinct order to go to Marlboro³ the day of going and the day of returning and everything settled railway exactness and then to have that when I had made up my mind to it (as to take a pill) suddenly changed then to hear of Watson's (which by the way was not a village school but in his house with his pupils) and then that not doing because I was not a classic.

Now to have to abide Marlboro' again for a month! Perhaps hanging on as a burden to Uncle Fred⁴ without being able to do anything for him – I always thought a fortnight a long visit but a month I am sure would be tiresome to him. I really do not want to get myself in opposition to Papa as you seem to think (Uncle Fred has forwarded your letter) but it makes my heart sick to think of a year of insupportable indolence with only the Voluntary⁵ to read for and that is a mere trifle. I know several of the subjects already.

¹ The correct address is Victoria Street.

² Date entered in pencil at a later date. Probably, but necessarily, by Sabine. Probably, but not necessarily, correct.

³ As assistant master.

⁴ Frederick Bond, then headmaster of Marlborough Grammar School.

⁵ The Voluntary: The Voluntary Theological Examination, preparation for which was given by a series of lectures by the Lady Margaret Professor of Theology in Cambridge and which at this time was increasingly required by the bishops from those seeking to take Holy Orders.

You seem to be so afraid of my not getting a gentleman's situation but I don't care three straws for it being a gentleman's place so long as I can be doing something which will fit me hereafter for H. orders. I thought that a middle school⁶ would be best for that but I think this⁷ [*idea?*] of going to Mr King's parish⁸ would be better and I should have time to get a little experience before entering it, for the curate with whom I should live is not coming for a month in which time I should visit the ragged schools of London and go down sometimes when the college lectures are given and do odds and ends of work.⁹

Here I know some only poor clerks, some trades people who put one to shame they come from their work perhaps only in the evening and then go off to teach in a night school they have themselves started and which they themselves support, and that is not all they give all they can moreover towards the burials of the poor and provide bier, palls and everything for them for about a quarter of the price that undertakers would charge and go out in turn themselves with the coffins to the cemeteries.

If Papa will let me I should stay on here in London and shall only have my board to pay for, this month I should be leaving my work, [*at St. Barnabas*] after that going into Mr King's parish and the curate and I would live together and do what we could. I should then get some practical knowledge which is worth years of theoretical study. The expense would not be more than I would live at home for the journey and all included. I have spoken to Col. Sabine about it he did not like my tying myself down for a year or two for fear of my health giving way, but saw no objection to my going there until the end of June [*1857*] to see how I liked it so as to leave whenever I got tired or not well or anything of the kind.

What good will being in the Brit Mus. do towards my going into orders and yet you suggest that. Uncle Sabine proposes my going as a travelling companion with someone abroad, but that would only make me more unsettled in my habits than ever. Whatever it is it must be a matter of time about orders, if Papa refuses to let me go for years then I must wait for years and prepare for years that is all.

You must excuse dear Mama all my bitterness in that unfortunate letter,¹⁰ but I had not recovered¹¹ the degree which is a terrible strain on the nerves and then all this miserable bother afterwards only made me worse and nearly drove me to desperation. What you say of the dons I do not think is fair. I am quite confident if you were to ask any of them that they would give me a very good character in my college. I will tell you what gave me great comfort just lately and would not have repeated it but to show you that you are rather too harsh upon my conduct at college which you judge as if it had been of consummate wickedness. Of course I have not been free from

⁶ Sabine was possibly referring to the 'Middle School' at Hurstpierpoint where he eventually went.

⁷ Sabine appears to have omitted a word here. He might well have intended 'I think this *idea*...'

⁸ Mr. King's parish: Presumably Sabine meant St. Georges-in-the-East, Wapping, of which Mr Bryan King was rector. The parish was much troubled by riots. The Rev. Charles Lowder of St Barnabas, where Sabine was working and staying, had established a mission at nearby Wellclose Square, Wapping. Mr King's wife was the sister of Fardell, a student friend of Sabine's at Cambridge. *Early Reminiscences*, 1923, London, Bodley Head p 261; *The Church Revival*, 1914, London, Methuen, p 232.

⁹ Probably one of the schools established by the mission at St Georges-in -the-East. See below

¹⁰ This letter has probably not survived

¹¹ Interpreted as 'Recovered from.'

blame but I have not done wrong willingly and believe I have led a far better life (such as it was) at college than I do at home. At first the men used to say most unkind and wicked things about me and it made me so unhappy (that was my first year) that I was almost in despair, they used to show me such contempt and men I had known would stare at me and then walk away without taking the slightest notice of me. Well I know that at a wine last term¹² one of the freshman brought up my name and said he thought I was a hypocrite or else and they were the fastest men in college to shut him up directly and said they would not allow a word to be said against me.

I would not have told you this little matter, which small as it was gave me intense pleasure as I did not know till I heard it just as going away that the men in college had ever changed their opinion about me so I had always shunned them as much as possible, but that I wish to show you (and you are the only person I would repeat the little incident to) that the stricture on my college behaviour is hardly just. As for my reading I never could have got mathematical honours.

I know I am the last person to under rate my abilities as you know pretty well, but I know perfectly well what I can do and what I cannot. I have done as well in my degree as it was possible for me to do. If I feel that I am not suited for H. orders at the end of June if papa will only let me try what the work is like before putting my foot irrevocably into it I will freely give it up and set about something else.

Perhaps it may prove as treacle to stop the shop boy and cure so that he never touches it again when once he has had his fill.

With best love to all

Your affect. son

Sabine B-G.

N.B. Why on earth did you tell Margaret my opinion about Mr Marsh,¹³ I thought at least you might have kept that back. I dread now giving any opinion upon any matter as a burnt child dreads the fire.

The following lines are written down the side of this page.

I have seen Charley but shall not go near the Gardiners¹⁴ I don't like Sam and so had better keep away.

Comment:

This is one of the most important Baring-Gould family letters in the Devon Record Office. The content and the hurried way in which it is written without any date and with limited regard for grammatical correctness all suggest it was penned hastily, at a time of considerable distress and tension between himself and his parents.

¹² Presumably Michaelmas 1856

¹³ His sister Margaret and her future husband, the Rev. Theodore Marsh

¹⁴ The Gardiners: Sabine's paternal Aunt Margaret Baring-Gould married Rawson Boddham Gardiner, described by Sabine in *Early Reminiscences*, p 110, as *ugly* and *disagreeable*. Their son, Samuel, was an historian *with a marvellous memory for dates and facts*.

Sabine was deeply resentful of the way in which his father had ordered him hither and thither, with all sorts of suggestions for what his parents saw as suitable employment that would take him away from what they regarded as disreputable and inappropriate. It is known from Sabine's diary, 12 September 1880, that on coming down from Cambridge, his father had told him that if he went ahead with ordination, as he wished, he would not inherit the estate. In 'Early Reminiscences' Sabine wrote euphemistically that he 'slipped away' from Lew. Whatever the manner of his going, it is probable that he left Lew House in great distress and anger after failing to reach any agreement with his father on his future. Sabine travelled to London where he called on the Rev. Lowder at St Barnabas Church, Pimlico. Lowder had founded the Society of the Holy Cross and was a prominent member of the Tractarian movement of which his father did not approve. Sabine was drawn to the Tractarians during his time at Cambridge and had already stayed at St Barnabas during vacations and undertaken unpaid employment in the choir school. He now took up this work again, staying in the Priest's House. He did not let his parents know where he was but was prevailed upon by Lowder to keep in contact with them through his uncle, Col. Edward Sabine. In both Diary and Reminiscences his uncle is described as a General and President of the Royal Society but these advancements and honours came after the events of 1857. He was promoted Major General in 1859 and General in 1870. He was an eminent polar explorer and geophysicist; knighted 1869 and President of the Royal Society from 1861 to 71.

Entries in the diary imply that this letter was written after Sabine had been at Pimlico for up to two months, was running out of funds and needing to sue for peace with his parents.

His parents would almost certainly have been aware, from newspaper reports, of the Rev. Bryan King and the troubles at St Georges-in-the-East and his father would never have agreed with the suggestion that Sabine go there 'for a year or two.' It is interesting that even the polar explorer, Col Sabine, was concerned that his nephew should not undertake such stressful work for more than a couple of months for fear it would affect his health.

Sabine's parents would have been unmoved by his graphic description of the fine work carried out by the mission at Wapping. Sabine was patently deeply distressed by their refusal to take heed of his wishes and, in addition to fury at his father, this letter also reveals a sense of grievance over what he saw as a betrayal by his mother who, in a postscript, he accused of not respecting confidences about his sister's forthcoming marriage in May that year. His concerns for that marriage, echoed in his diary on 5 Jan 1881, were prophetic as the marriage appears to have failed at some point as will be developed in the comments to letter DRO14. Sabine was also stung by accusations that his poor degree reflected indolence or worse.

Sabine was at pains to demonstrate to his mother the high level of stress and despair he had experienced throughout his whole time at Cambridge as a result of perceived hostility from other students, in the hope that this would at least soften her heart, if not his father's. It is tempting to speculate on why other students might have behaved in a hostile way towards Sabine but it was probably for no other reason than that he stood out and was picked on because of his earnest manner, pious attitudes and

behaviour. It is not surprising that parental accusations of bad behaviour cause him so much distress.

It is reasonable to conclude that, whatever Sabine may have believed, his parents must have been very troubled by his disappearance in London. They would have viewed his behaviour as wilfully disobedient and irresponsible and would not have understood this early manifestation of their son's steadfast dedication to idealised goals.

The eventual solution to this impasse was achieved with the help of the Rev. Charles Lowder who found Sabine a paid teaching appointment with the Woodard Schools at New Shoreham. Sabine's father would have been uneasy at this appointment but would nevertheless grudgingly accepted the schools as respectable establishments. It is unlikely that his father was aware of the full extent of Dr Woodard's commitment to the Tractarian movement and the problems created in the schools by a somewhat furtive use of the confessional by the chaplains in their dealings with the boys. This had at least the tacit approval and encouragement of Dr Woodard.

Importantly, it is evident from subsequent correspondence with his mother that contact with his parents was re-established and the serious rift with them rapidly patched up if not healed.

DRO02: Sabine to mother

No month, year or address is given at the head of this letter. However the month is verified by the reference to Sabine's mother's birthday, 12 November. The year can be established from calendars as 1857, when Sunday fell on 8th November and with the knowledge that the third Woodard School started in 1858. (January 1858 rather than Christmas 1857 as might be inferred from the letter.) The address, from the content of the letter is clearly St John's College, Hurstpierpoint

Sunday 8th
Tuesday 10th

My dearest Mama

I am very sorry that I have been so remiss in writing, having been very busy. Our play went off very well, I had to work hard at the scenery, but did not take part in the performance myself.

We are now collecting for the bonfire which comes off on the Prince of Wales birthday.

What day do you think Papa will come here? His best way would be to take this on his route from Devonshire. I was not at all vexed by what you said about my German trip, indeed, I soon gave up the notion, as my idea of leaving here only originated with a small breeze I had with the headmaster, at his having used some hasty expressions to me which I thought proper to require him to retract as it originated in a mistake of his own. He did so readily and made an apology so that we are all very good friends again.

Our third school starts at Christmas I am glad to say, I believe it is not decided who is to be the headmaster, but I hope it will be Wilson.¹⁵

I should like Papa if possible to come here some Thursday or Saturday as then I have little work, the best if convenient would be the 28th if he could stop over the next two days Sunday and Monday, which being a Saint's day is a whole holiday and I should have nothing to do. It would be rather awkward on any other day of the week as I am engaged almost all the day.

I have got something in my eye, I have found out some time ago that the Barings are descended from Bayring the Beautiful king of the Saxons but I did not know his pedigree and had written to Iceland for the saga about him. I have picked up a good many details since then and got a good bit of the pedigree from the sagas, Baering was son of the famous Ragnar Lodbrok and I have made out the pedigree from the Hervarar saga, Ragnar Lodbrok saga, Erbyggja¹⁶ saga and Laxdæla saga, up as far back as Odin!!

And I am in raptures to find that Iceland was first colonised by a family related to us. I have some idea of collecting all the chronicles of the Baring family together, translating them from the Icelandic and into a volume with the whole pedigree one of these days, when I know some more Icelandic, or when I can get a proper dictionary,

¹⁵ The first headmaster of the third school at Ardingley was the Rev. Dirs de Mertens, *Early Reminiscences*, p 288

¹⁶ Eyrbyggja

and then writing to Lord Ashburton to ask him if I may dedicate it to him as being the history of his family. It would be one of the most wildly romantic histories imaginable, full of such beautiful stories. I really believe the Baring family to be one of the most ancient in Europe. The royal families of Norway, Sweden and Denmark were derived from that family and probably the Saxon monarchy would have continued so had not Charlemagne smashed it.

If I was to go to Iceland I should claim relationships with the descendants of those who settled there if I could find them which is likely enough, as the Icelanders are most particular about keeping up their pedigree.

With best love to dear Papa, Willy and Drakey, and kind remembrances to Miss K,¹⁷
I remain your affect. son
Sabine Baring Gould

PS How all the world is taking to marrying, so my chance at Kelly is gone not that I care one jot. I really think I must see what can be done for myself sometime, if only I had enough to live on I think I should try my chance at Danny¹⁸ with Miss Mary Campion as either the report of her engagement to Ld. Pevensy was false or it has blown over. She would make a very nice little wife and belongs to a good family.

The following undated 'NB' on a separate sheet of paper, dealing with similar subjects to the above, initiates matters carried forward in a subsequent letter. The handwriting and paper also match well. It is therefore concluded the two sheets belong together.

I wish that while passing through Exeter, Papa would go into Tucker's Picture shop Fore Street Hill Exeter. Sissy¹⁹ and I are going to make a present to Lew of the repairing of the Red Man²⁰, considering that decency forbad his making an appearance so publicly any longer either in the hall or in his namesake. Tucker restored the Guildhall pictures so I suspect he is quite able to do this, the picture is there and I would like Papa to see what a job he is making of it; I hope to goodness he will not put on a thick layer of varnish. I intended not to have said a word about it but left him to shine out in decent breeches before you when you returned home, but I am anxious to know how Tucker is doing it so I shall not keep my secret any longer.

¹⁷ Miss K. and Kelly House: It is tempting to speculate that 'Miss K' might have been a Miss Kelly of Kelly House, Kelly, Lifton, Devon and that, between the letter and the PS, a letter arrived from his mother with news of her engagement/marriage.

¹⁸ Danny House, Hurstpierpoint: Home of the Campions, distant relatives through the Barings.

¹⁹ Sissy: Familiar name for sister Margaret

²⁰ The Red Man: This portrait of Mr. John Petty, who came of the Lansdowne family and was married to Diana Amelia, daughter of Col. Sabine, was used by Sabine's father as a temporary repair for a broken window with disastrous results. *Early Reminiscences*, p 103. It was known as *The Red Man* because of his red coat. It would be interesting to know in what room, then known as *The Red Man* it had hung. One can but guess! In the entry in his diary for 20 August 1880, Sabine wrote that he paid £10 to have this restoration imperfectly executed in Exeter and had now had a new copy of the painting done.

By the way, I am on the scent of the Monk pictures now, I believe I know where one portrait of the General is, but whether I shall be able to get it or not is another matter, it will be quite a romance if I do. I shall not tell you the story till I have it. The others passed into the hands of the Prides, a Mr Pride married into the family in Ch. 2nd's reign and I shall find out about them through one of the father I have got.²¹

Did I tell you of one of Spencer²² the poet I picked up at the same time along with it. It is an original by Alessandro Allni and really beautifully painted; I fancy the picture must be worth a good deal, the flesh is quite luminous; it was broken and in a frightful state of dirt and crumple when I got it, but I have filled in the cracks myself, washed it, and varnished it, and now it hangs on my chimney piece. I am going to practice faces in oil from it, I wanted a copy.

I had a letter forwarded from Cambridge to me from Ninian Hill, he said that he was coming south and would visit me at Cambridge with his wife if I was there, I wrote directly entreating him to come to me here but I have had no answer, and this is[?] of a fortnight since. I feel he must have started from Edinburgh before my letter arrived, I am very vexed about it as I should like to have renewed our old friendship.

I think if I were to be married I should stipulate first that our wedding trip should be to Iceland. I should like to see our relatives there. I have been painting a large coat of arms on parchment as a birthday present for you but cannot send it, as I have not quite succeeded, the paint peels off. It is full of the arms we have a right to quarter and drawn up quite heraldically under the direction of a very good herald, so I know it is all right.

Should not you like to live in Iceland, Mama! I should!

I was for some time in a dreadful fright about Ninian's visit, as I had forgotten to say I could not take in the wife and babies, so I have been daily trembling that a fly should drive up with a whole family nursery maid etc and have nowhere to store them away.

We have our choir feast on 14th Decr. And the boar's head is brought in, and a great Christmas tree.

Ask Papa not to forget his copy of the Franconian Switzerland for Miss Porcher [?] I promised that she should have one, and by the way when at Mrs Knight's I told Mr. Charles Conley that we should be very glad to see him at Lew next summer, as he kept on saying how much he should like to see it again, that he had not been there for such a long while etc and etc. He is a very agreeable person, Mrs Knight very much so indeed. Miss Knight I was delighted to find was a geologist and Mrs Knight a bit of an architect. Mrs Kindersley is a charming little body. I wish I was in Iceland; I have got all sorts of odd stories of our relatives there.

I remain your affect. son
S.B-G.

²¹ See *Never Completely Submerged, Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, 2009, Guildford, GHP, 4 July 1880, p 33

²² Edmund Spenser, 1552-1598

Comment:

The easy chatty nature of this letter suggests that the tensions evident in a letter written to his mother some seven months previously had gone. He was looking forward to a visit from his father and, once more, shared confidences with his mother.

Sabine did not reveal the nature of the 'small breeze' with the headmaster but his touchiness towards an authority figure suggests he was taking a while to re-adjust following his forced departure from St Barnabas and the derailment of his preferred career course.

It is known from what was written elsewhere that his enthusiasm for purchasing and restoring pictures was not matched by his success. In 'The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould, 18 July 1880, he was annoyed to discover that the picture of General Monk may originally have been of someone else later but later re-painted as General Monk.

The references to Miss K and Miss Champion as possible wives is the only reference known to the author suggesting a serious interest in the opposite sex between a possible infatuation with Constance Frazer at Pau in 1851 and his meeting with Grace Taylor in 1864.

This letter would suggest that a significant motivation for Sabine's visit to Iceland four years later was his conviction, through a Norse saga, that there he would uncover significant family links with his Baring forbears.

Sabine's own failure to mention these putative family links in his published writing about that trip could reflect the scepticism evident in a note to the 'Early Pedigree of the Baring family', which Sabine had researched for the revised 'Visitation of Devon' published in 1895:

"The name of Baring appears as that of the hero of the Baring Saga, the existing version of which in old Norse is believed, according to the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, to be the translation of a German romance of the 13th century. The saga is a mere story, but the hero's name may perhaps be taken as evidence that the name of Baring existed on the lower Elbe in the 13th century, and possibly as evidence that it was even then looked upon as an ancient name"

A far cry from Sabine's early belief of the importance of the Baring family in European history and the existence of many of his relatives in Iceland.

The enthusiasm with which Sabine followed up his pedigree and worked on the family heraldry while at Hurst remained in evidence throughout his life.

DRO03: SBG to mother:

The year of this letter is not given but as Sabine returned to the matter of Miss Champion's engagement and continued the business of 'the Red Man' and 'Spenser' paintings, it is likely to be no more than a few months after the letter of 8 and 10 November 1857. The likely date is therefore 17 May 1858.

S John's College
Hurstpierpoint
Sussex
17th May

My dear Mama

I hope you will come and see me for a day; it will be only a short run. I wish you would not think the Campions very grand people, they are not so at all, and you made me quite indignant in one letter by saying it was as well to look above one, while referring to them; Their family is not a bit greater than ours, as they first came into notice in Q Elizabeth's reign before which they were nothing, while I know our pedigree back to 1224 AD, and besides which, it was a noble family of Devon before the Conquest. The Campions may be better off than we are, but that has nothing to do with the case at all. Papa and Willy have been here and staying at Danny [House], I fear that the latter was rather rough in his manners and must have astonished them a little. Miss Champion is I hear engaged to a very rich man, but as yet it is only a report.

Pray take more care of the Lew pictures, Mama, the red man will cost me 10£ redoing, and it will be no joke if any more of them get damaged. It would compel me to go into rags, so as to be able to redo them. As it is the red man²³ will want, besides, a frame; that you must give; he must be hung up in his old place on the stairs. I am going to bring my Spencer²⁴ home for the Drawing room, and want instead the print of the 'Dispute of the Blessed Sacrament' by Raphael in the portfolio.

With best love to all, I remain

Your affect. son

Sabine baring Gould

Comment:

On the whole another chatty letter but revealing some irritation with his mother over her concern, should he press his suit with Miss Champion, because of what she saw as the Baring-Gould's lower social status. Sabine lectured her on the social status of the Goulds and their long pedigree. In any case it seems Miss Champion was engaged elsewhere so it was immaterial. Nevertheless this gives a glimpse of one aspect of mother's personality and into Sabine's awareness of his own social position.

Sabine referred to the visit by his father and brother Willy and commented on Willy's display of 'rough manners' when staying at Danny House with the Campions. This behaviour is not easy to explain in terms of the mental illness which was probably first apparent in the mid-1860s. Sabine also looked forward to his mother's visit.

Sabine's pre-occupation with portraits evident in the previous letter continued

²³ Red Man: Portrait of John Petty. See letter DRO02

²⁴ Spencer portrait: See DRO02

DRO04: Sabine to mother

S. John's College
Hurstpierpoint
Dec 7th

The year is not given for this letter but from the content it is almost certainly 1858 despite the reference to his uncle as 'General' Sabine. His uncle was promoted Major General in 1859, then General 1870. It is possible he held acting rank at the end of 1858 or that Sabine was aware of imminent promotion.

My dear Mama

I sent you a Johnian²⁵ for this month by post, you will see in it a full account of what little has been going on here. I have had a cold, of course, everyone has had one with this uncertain weather, but that will not be in the Johnian. I am better now. I hear from Papa that you are likely to be in Teignmouth, about 17th the day we break up here, however I intend stopping a week in London to see Charley and General Sabine, also perhaps Ninian Hill. I shall then come down to Teignmouth at once, when I hope something will be settled about the Red Man. There is a story of mine in the Johnian this month, beside Oraefadal²⁶, which I am afraid you will not like, it is in my 'mystic style'²⁷, which is not 'so called' practical. You have a great dread I know of imagination but wrongly I think, the modern view of it is, that it is to be quenched not cultivated, that is a very narrow view of the human mind and soul.

If the imagination is a gift of God it is intended to be developed. Minds are comparative or creative, i.e. intellectual and imaginative, and one system of organisation must be trained as well as the other. I believe that every work of the pure imagination is inspired, not when shackled by comparison with facts. 'Vanity Fair' or one of Dickens' novels would be types of imagination coupled with earth, like Pegasus yoked to an ox to draw a plough, but where free and purely imaginative such as 'Undine' 'Sintram'²⁸ and most fairy stories, I would consider heavenborn. Their beauty is unearthly and mystic, always containing some subtle awful mystery of nature or revelation worked out. The charm of these stories is that we feel this without understanding it when children.

That is the fourth sheet I have written to you and torn up one after another intending not to write this as you would not believe or appreciate it, however it is no good, I have not been able to help writing it. Do you know I have been counting my books and find that I have got 26 new ones this year and nearly all are French or German, and what is another thing is that I have read them all but one or two last come. I have

²⁵ *The Hurst Johnian*: The magazine of St John's College, Hurstpierpoint. Sabine was involved in its foundation and designed the front cover.

²⁶ *Öroefa-dal: An Icelandic Tale*: The Hurst Johnian, serialised 1858-9; *Oræfadal, The Iceland farers*, Boys Illustrated Annual, serialised 1893; *The Icelander's Sword or The Story of Oræfa-dal*, Methuen 1894. Note the spelling variation in the Hurst Johnian.

²⁷ Story in the Mystic Style: This must have been *Master Sacristan Eberhart* which was first published alongside *Öroefa-dal* chapter X' in the *Hurst Johnian*, no.7 Dec. 1858, pp.238-250; reprinted *Hurst Echoes* 1890 pp. 34-44. Included in Richard Dalby's *Margery of Quether and other Weird Tales* 1999 Sarob Press. Several of Sabine's stories in the *Johnian* and Dalby's *Margery of Quether* are in a similar style

²⁸ *Undine and Sintram and his Companions*: Romantic stories by the German writer, Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, 1777-1843

been getting up the history of Literature up to the 16th Cent. In Europe and find that it is a vast subject which is full of intense interest. Having got a fair idea of Scandinavian literature I have gone on to Provencal and other Romance languages. I get on capitally with my German: - it is quite curious, today I had a book which I ordered, a German one of Rhine legends, which I must have seen when in Germany, for the pictures I remember clearly and it is quite curious the old associations which they call up, not having seen or read the book for some 18 or 19 years.²⁹ In the winter one must read, during the summer I would give myself up wholly to drawing a study of Nature, but during the long evenings must take out the Litterae Germaniores.³⁰

We have had a great deal of sickness here, of one kind or another, I hear that there have already been 300 laid up at Eton: has there been much sickness in the parish?

It is very odd that cousin Tom³¹ should not have answered my letter about the Red Man, I wrote to him late in September asking him to call at Tuckers and find out about the picture; has he been away from home?³²

So you are reading 'The Faery Queen,' I hope that you understand that it is allegorical, the Red Cross Knight being Chivalry, Una – Religion: Una among the wood spirits is the Faith taming wild and turbulent nature, the betrothal of Una and the Red Cross Knight the union of Chivalry and Religion.

The Faery Queen is quite a phenomenon in literature as in all its features it should belong to an earlier date, the 13th cent about, and it is quite different from the usual production of the 16th when the allegory was lost; but in type it is not unlike the early romances which it professes to attach itself, those of the cycle of the Round Table, which are quite as long, nearly as beautiful in language and often bolder in imagery. I am reading Dante, whose 'Divina Commedia' is just after my own heart, far outrivaling Milton I think. Do you notice what to me is the perfection of Spenser and the pre-16th cent poets, the perfect loss of self in their writings, compare a page of the Faery Queen with Miles Standish for instance, in the one you have pure living nature, in the second nature is only used as a looking glass for the poet's contemptible feelings. As an example – "They talked of the Spring and the sunshine, the birds, and the Mayflower that sailed on the morrow"

Nature is intended to elevate the soul to God not to lower the train of thought to a dirty copper-bottomed boat.

I remain your affect. son

Sabine Baring Gould

Comment:

Much of this letter was taken up with Sabine explaining to his mother his newly taken up 'mystic style.' He told his mother that she dreaded imagination and was

²⁹ Sabine inferred he would have first read this book aged 6 or 7

³⁰ Litterae Germaniores: A humorous play on 'Litterae Humaniores' the name of the Oxford University School of 'Greats,' which translates as 'more civilised forms of literature'. Sabine's meaning would therefore seem to have been 'more German forms of literature'

³¹ See letters DRO01 and 02

³² Cousin Tom: Identity uncertain. He is also referred to in letters to Sabine's father where the context suggests he was a member of the Bond family

concerned that she would not approve of his writing. The fear of her disapproval caused Sabine to start and then destroy 4 earlier attempts to write on the subject before finally making up his mind, completing and sending this one. His enthusiastic comments on the 'Faery Queen,' which his mother was reading, were somewhat in the nature of a lecture but there is also the inference that Sabine and his mother did regularly discuss literature in their correspondence. He seemed to need her approval but was wary of the same rejection he experienced from his father.

His own reading was, unsurprisingly, wide ranging at this time with his attraction to medieval writers already well developed. He boasted that he had acquired 26 new books in 1858, mostly French and German, but, presumably, he also had access to a good library at Hurst.

Much Ado About Nothing: *Not mentioned in the letter but 'The Hurst Johnian' for December 1858 informs us that in October the school had staged a production of 'Much Ado About Nothing' – no doubt covered in an earlier letter.*

Sabine took the part of Claudio, which he was said to have

“carried off with great care.”

He also painted both the night scene in Messina and the prison scene, both described as “especially deserving of note.”

Mr and Mrs Campion were in the audience – perhaps as Sabine's guests. Was Mary Campion there as well?

DRO05: Sabine to father

Horbury
Wakefield
Aug17th
186-
[The date must be 1865 from references to the building of the Horbury Brig Mission
and to Sabine's father's second wife, Lavinia. Their marriage was on 28 February
1865]

My dear Father

I will write to cousin Tom about the legacy and the 21£ I have drawn.³³ There is some mistake about it. The money I drew last year just after Easter to pay my ordination expenses, and it was taken from mama's bequest. There was also some which went to pay Aunt Fanny³⁴ for the money she lent me for the Iceland trip. 15£ I believe I drew myself and the rest I told her to draw.

I am going to withdraw all my money from the bank, it will be about 200£ and I am going to have the land at Horbury Bridge³⁵ conveyed to me, so that the land and buildings will be my own personal property and this will ensure me against loss in the event of Sharp's death, as the land will be well worth its price at any time and I can always sell it.

As soon as convenient Sharp will buy it of me, but for a few years it will be my own. This I believe is the best arrangement that could be made as it gives me certainty of not losing my money, and I might have risked it had I lent it on mortgage. My plans and specifications are out and tenders are sent in today. I take the lowest separate tenders for mason's work, carpenting [*sic*], smith's work and slating and plastering. I find stone, brick, slate, lime, sand etc. I expect the lowest contract will be 450£.

Tell uncle Alex.³⁶ that the building will not be open by Octr. Not till after Xsmas I fear. He is to preach for me on that event.

Tell Livy³⁷ that I had 4 vols of Illusts. From Mr. Dymond.

I have been laid up a week with rheumatism in my neck, which has constrained me to sit contemplating the ceiling without intermission.

I remain your very affect.

S Baring Gould

P.S. Do send me something for my building. I am at my wits end where to find money.³⁸

³³ Cousin Tom and the Legacy: Presumably the legacy concerned is that of Sabine's mother, née Sophia Bond. This would imply that 'cousin Tom' was also a member of the Bond family. See DRO01 and 02

³⁴ Frances E Bond of 4 Colleton Crescent Exeter

³⁵ For building of the Horbury Brig Mission. See *Half My Life* by Keith Lister, p 46-49

³⁶ Paternal uncle, the Rev. Alexander Baring-Gould.

³⁷ Stepmother, Lavinia

³⁸ Sabine need not have worried. His appeal raised £800 and was free of debt when the mission was officially opened on 6 January 1866, *Half My Life* p 49.

DRO06: Sabine to father

Horbury
Wakefield
July 30 1866

My dear Father

The bracelet has arrived, and with it what I did not want, a chain, and card case, however I can stow them away.

Aunt Fanny³⁹ has the brooch, I gave it to her, but she said to me that she wished it to go with the bracelet, and I thought from what she said that she had given it to my mother.

Thank you for your letter and the trouble you have taken over the bracelet.

I am sorry that you still think I mistook my vocation in taking orders; I have never regretted it for one moment, and I do not think, judging from the way God has blessed my work at the Brig that I did other than follow his guidance in choosing the ministry. I cannot but regard it as a token of his approval, that in such a short time I should have been able to get hold of a place where the dissenters had tried and failed, and which was notorious all the county round for its disorderliness.

The school numbers one hundred and fifty children and there are twenty four teachers, a capital congregation, all in the place of absolutely nothing two years ago. I do not regard it in the least as my doing but as God's testimony to my having chosen right in having taken upon me the yoke of the ministry.

I have a great hankering after B. Columbia but I shall take a little longer to think about it.

I could not go as curate to Lew – I know well that in money matters it would be better, but you know that Aunt Marianne⁴⁰ always falls foul of the curate and would be sure to get across with me, besides which whilst young and with plenty of energy I have no right to waste my time and strength on a handful of people. Besides which I could not go on in the way in which Lew church services are conducted. Sensationalism is the order of the day and must be carried into the services of the church or we shall never get hold of the people.

You need not be alarmed at my marrying without seeing my way. I only make a suppositious case, and I am not likely to take to myself a wife yet a while.

I am sure that I cannot get down to Devon this year. I shall have to do without a holiday I fear and take a good long one next year.

Willy has never come to see me since I first came here, nor has he answered my last letter asking him so to do.

Believe me I remain yours very affectionately

³⁹ Frances E Bond

⁴⁰ Aunt Marianne: wife of his uncle, the Rev. Charles Baring-Gould then Rector of Lew Trenchard.

S Baring-Gould

Comment:

This letter would seem to have been written not long after the visit to Lew at which, according to the long diary entry on 12 September 1880⁴¹, Sabine so was distressed and angered by his brother Willy's rudeness and his father's attitude that he terminated his holiday at Lew abruptly.

He returned prematurely to Horbury in great anger and despair because of a mistaken assumption that father had finally decided to leave the estate to Willy. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that he wrote that he cannot get down to Devon this year. It is evident from the diary that he had no intention of doing so! It was only after his father's death that he realised that the unusual behaviour of his father and brother on that visit was directly related to Willy's serious ill health. Father never took Sabine into his confidence over the nature of this illness.

Given Sabine's understanding of the situation, his response in this letter to his father's continued negative attitude to his vocation showed surprising forbearance. It is to be wondered how many drafts of this letter ended up in the waste-paper basket?

We now know that whilst denying to his father any immediate intention of marriage he was at this time either engaged or close to engagement to Grace Taylor and considering going abroad as a missionary in either British Columbia or Honolulu as a way of distancing himself from Lew and paving the way for marriage to Grace who – as he wrote in his diary on 12 Sept 1880 - had nothing but would make a good wife in the New World

The significance of the bracelet is not known. Presumably this was one of a number of items of jewellery bequeathed to him by his mother. It is likely that he had asked his father to send it so that he could give it to Grace – quite possibly as an engagement present. It could be that the request for it to be sent added to his father's suspicions that Sabine was contemplating marriage.

It is interesting to see that his father was still expressing disapproval of Sabine's choice of vocation more than 2 years after ordination. Also of interest is one of several references by Sabine, in correspondence with his father, to Willy's failure to visit or to write. Sabine was clearly puzzled and probably hurt by this change in Willy's behaviour without being aware that it was due to mental illness.

⁴¹ Wawman R. *Never Completely Submerged; the Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, p 65-66

DRO07: Sabine to father

Dalton
Thirsk
Oct 25th
Probably 1867⁴²

My Dear Father

I have only a few moments to spare, and am off by train in half an hour to Bradford, where I have to lecture, and then I go to York, where the Archbishop holds a congress of his clergy and has put me on to speak. I go into Lancashire next week to lecture on "Iceland"

I sent you by post a sermon I preached for the Association for promoting the Unity of Christendom, in Leeds a few weeks ago. It is a sort of epitome of the ideas in my book.

I have asked Lord Downe to build on a couple of rooms but he has declined. I wish I could get somewhere else, but unfortunately I am not a good hand at parish work, I do not like it, and it is not my line; my sphere is in the midst of books, not country-people.

I have had a long grind at Luther's writing and am now working through Zwingli, the Zurich reformer, after that I shall take up Calvin. It is wonderful how different people appear when you come to their own words, than when you come to them from ex-parte writers.

I am off. Trains wait for no man.
I remain
Your very loving
S Baring-Gould

Comment:

It is clear from this letter but whether he felt cut off and isolated in Dalton or not, he was being invited to numerous lecture engagements. Presumably the book forming the basis for the sermon promoting the unity of Christendom was 'The Origin and Development of Religious Belief,' published 1869/70.

One can only speculate on why Sabine chose to admit to his father that he was not a good hand at parish work. He must have known that this would invite a 'told you so' response.

Of interest is the fact that no matter how negative his father's views might have been on Sabine's writing, Sabine continued to send him copies of his work at least until early 1872, just a few short months before father's death.

⁴² Probably dated to 1870 from the reference to the request to Lord Downe to build a couple of rooms on to the Rectory. K Lister, *Half My Life* p.71

Also of interest is what appears to be an admission that reading Zwingli and Luther in the original casts a new light on them. Was he implying that they were not quite as bad as he painted them in his published work?

DRO08: Sabine to father

East Mersea Rectory
 April 10th 1871

My dear Father

The assignment had better be cancelled. I do not understand law matters at all. Or if you like I will give a note of hand that on my receipt of £400 per ann., I will resign the annuity.

I cannot tell you for certain what the real income of this place is, but I think it must be about that, at least nominally though there is £50 off for Queen Anne's Bounty⁴³, and some other charges. But if anything were to happen to Uncle Charles⁴⁴, and I were to be given the Rectory my income would be less than £100 I suppose.

Then again should there not be some clause to the effect that the charges on Lew property to Willy and Drake and Arthur should be in some way affected, if they were receiving £400, they should relieve the property of the burden.

I have been some days without answering your letter, as I put it aside to answer at leisure when not in a great hurry, and it was mislaid somewhere, so that I could not find it to answer it till today.

I have got my duties taken for June and July, and am trying for May also, in that case I shall come down to Lew for May and go to Switzerland for June and July.

I remain

Yours affectionately
 Sabine Baring Gould

Comment:

The correspondence from father to which this letter refers is unavailable. Sabine did not seem to find the issue easy to understand and seems to have been irritated by it. It appears to have been an attempt by father to reduce Sabine's annuity from the estate to reflect his income from the living at East Mersea. Both would appear to have been around £400. Sabine seemed to be concerned that he and his brothers should be treated equally.

It is unlikely that Sabine went to Switzerland in June and July 1871. Further Reminiscences, chapter 5, describes a trip to Belgium in that year with his friend the Rev. Gatrill. The 1862 family bible gives the dates for this tour as May and June 1871. The pair visited the Tyrol in the winter of 1872-3.

⁴³ Queen Anne's Bounty: A Provision made in Queen Anne's reign for augmenting poor clerical livings.

⁴⁴ Uncle Charles: Paternal Uncle. The Rev. Charles Baring-Gould, then rector at Lew Trenchard

DRO09: Father to Sabine

Lew Trenchard

7 July 1871

My Dear Sabine,

I hope you did not think my observations on your book too severe. Certainly it was not my intention to make any remark that would wound you, but in some respects we must all differ.

Descartes could not make all people agree in the colour of the marble he held between his fingers, to his eyes it seemed red, to others green and again to a third, a colour blind person it appears grey, so it is with the mental eye. The fable of the carnation gives a like result, and the moral drawn from it is not to be too positive in our view of things. It may be correct or otherwise so we must make great allowances for the views of our opponents.

But I have another, totally different matter to speak about. The settlement of the Lew property. By the law no property can be entailed beyond three lives, two being in existence – Hence at my father’s death the entail ceased (or would have ceased had I not renewed it) the consequence would have been that at his death I might have sold it in total or in parts and given it to whom I liked even away from my own family. My father wished to prevent any possibility of my so doing and I myself having no such intention acquiesced in his wish to re-entail the property adding to that entail the alternate presentation of the Living which I purchased off my father. Now life is uncertain and you would probably wish to make some settlement on your wife which you could do at once were the property re-entailed – Now I have no interest whatever in urging you to this step excepting a wish to keep the property intact – I could at present will, that so many farms should go to Willy, so many to Drakey, Arthur, Maggy and Lilah [*sic*] – but that is not my wish. I would leave all the property to you (provided it was re-entailed) leaving moderate jointures to the younger children to revert to the property at their death. That is to say the yearly payments would expire with them and with the death of the whole of them the property would assume the income alienated from it during their lives, to the use of your children, or children’s children – now this proposition does not arise out of any mistrust of you, but circumstances do arise during a person’s life to make him wish to sell portions of it to meet demands and difficulties which in a little time disappear. Had not the property been tied up during my father’s life to my use after him a great portion of it I feel sure⁴⁵ [*Read as ‘would have gone’*] to meet losses in mining speculation. Arundell property disappeared from difficulties arising from over expenditure which would not have been the case had the property been entailed. I will get a deed drawn out stating the terms.

The rest of this letter is missing.

Comment:

This letter is of interest for the pompous way in which, in a critique of Sabine’s book, Edward lectured his son, then aged 37, and offered no word of encouragement. It is not clear what book evoked Edward’s critical reaction.

⁴⁵ Some words appear to have been omitted at this point. ‘would have gone’ makes sense.

Most importantly this letter demonstrated that certainly from this date Sabine was aware that, provided he agreed to the property being re-entailed, he would inherit the Lew estate on the death of his father – which event occurred some 10 months later. The diary is not explicit on this matter and it would be easy to infer from what is written there on 12 Sept 1880 that Sabine was unaware that he was to inherit until after his father's death.

Why did his father finally decide at this point in time to tell Sabine that he was minded to leave the estate to his eldest son, Sabine, and not to Willy as he had threatened? It is evident from Sabine's diary that Willy was now seriously ill and that his father knew that Willy was not expected to recover. It is also clear that Sabine was kept in ignorance of Willy's illness and only became aware of it after his father's death. Whatever reservations father may have had about Sabine's choice of career, Sabine was by this time established in a reasonably well-paid Crown Living, demonstrating an ability to live independently and beginning to show his skill as a writer. He had in addition, a growing family and the prospect at some stage of an heir. All these factors could well have swayed Edward and may also explain why he did not at this point consider leaving the estate to the younger son, Edward Drake, who at this time would have been 20 years old.

Sabine's father died, quite unexpectedly, on 26 May 1872. Sabine and Grace visited him shortly before his death. The main purpose of the visit was to finalise the settlement of the estate with its entail on 15 May 1872 – a mere eleven days before Edward's death.

DRO10: Sabine to father

East Mersea Rectory
Oct 20th 1871

My dear Father

I want to know how old I am. I have lost all count of my life, and had to put in all by guesswork in the census. Now I have determined to put down dates in a big Bible, so I should like your birthday, and year, mamma's and mine, also, if you can remember, in what year I went to school at Vevey, at Manheim [*sic*], London, Warwick, and at College.

Grace has not got over her troubles yet, and I think the expected stranger to be one of the "Myths of Modern Times." We have had a nurse in the house six weeks, and she may remain for six more for aught I know.

Grace says perhaps she has swallowed the egg of some monster, newt, effet [*eft?*] or crocodile, and it has hatched and thriven within. I want Maggie and Theodore⁴⁶ to come here and be godparents to the infant crocodile, as we have no friends in the neighbourhood we care to ask, except two ladies, who are also expecting crocodiles about the same time.

I wish the business were over it is very trying to poor Grace. I am building poultry houses and pig styes [*sic*] and going out in that line now a bit. We have so much green stuff in the garden that we can keep several pigs on it, and we want poultry when living far from a butcher.

I remain

Yours t'ly

S Baring Gould.

Comment:

This is a delightfully chatty letter from the rectory at East Mersea touching on several subjects.

Sabine's response to the 1871 census was to seek confirmation of dates of birth etc, including his own. He formed the intention to write all these down in a big Bible. Presumably this is the origin of the family Bible, published in 1862, in which all this information was indeed inscribed and which was held at Plymouth Library. Sadly, despite exhaustive enquiries, the current location of this bible is not known. Fortunately photocopies of the family entries in the bible were made at some point and are held at the West Country Study Library, Exeter. The full transcription of the family entries have been published⁴⁷

Sabine's comments about Grace being great with child and long overdue are amusing. Sabine's son, Edward, eventually arrived one month later on 17 November.

⁴⁶ Sabine's sister and her husband, the Rev. Theodore Marsh

⁴⁷ Wawman R, *Never Completely Submerged*, pp 208-218

The decision to keep pigs and poultry because of the abundance of vegetables in the garden and the remoteness of the nearest butcher gives insight into his life-style at Mersea at this time.

DRO11: Sabine to father

East Mersea Rectory
Colchester

Nov 12th [clearly 1871 from the content and father's inscription]

My dear Father

I have been waiting from day to day to write to you, hoping to be enabled to announce to you the birth of another child – I hope a son. But it has not arrived yet, and Grace is strangely out in her reckoning, for we have had a nurse nine weeks in the house, which is a bore.

I do not quite understand the settlement⁴⁸ in one particular. It seems to me that in the event of my having no son, according to the terms of the settlement, Lew would be divided, share and share alike between my daughters. This I think very objectionable. I think it much better that it should go to the eldest male heir, and that my daughters should have only an annuity out of it. It would be a grievous thing to have Lew property broken up, or to have it pass to another family and name. I had much rather, in the event of my death without male issue that it passed to Willy.

I may have misunderstood the document as the legal terminology is obscure, but you will know if it is so or not.

Consequently I have waited till I knew the sex this coming child would be before I asked this question.

Grace goes on pretty well but very much troubled at the delay in the arrival. I fear she strained herself nine weeks ago, with moving a heavy filter [?] and that was the cause of her illness which made us suppose the event was coming off then.

We are reading through Gibbon's Decline and Fall. I do hope the coming crocodile is not waiting to hear the last of the seven thick volumes out, and to arrive with the capture of Constantinople, in the year 1452, under Palaeodyces⁴⁹, for we are now only half way through vol. III, and have just assisted at the death of Theodosius⁵⁰ in 395; and it will really be too bad if he waits out the subsequent one thousand and fifty eight years, before he retires to the crib upstairs to scream over the fate of the fallen Empire, in the ears of his mother and nurse.

I am rather thinking of writing the History of the Anabaptists from their rise at Zuichau [Zwickau] in 1521 to the fall of their kingdom of Münster [Westphalia, Germany] in 1536. It is an almost unwritten passage in history, full of strange, wild interest. But I must go and pay a visit to Münster next Spring if I do so; and I am not sure that my undertaking of the "Lives of the Saints" will give me time for writing anything else. I hardly calculated the amount of work I was in for, or how monotonous much of it would prove.

I remain

Yours t'ly

S Baring Gould

⁴⁸ Settlement of the Estate with the entail.

⁴⁹ Palaeologos otherwise known as Constantine XI, the last Byzantine Emperor

⁵⁰ Roman Emperor

Inscribed, probably by Sabine's father: Sabine's letter 12 Novr. 1871 To be kept.

Comment:

Another chatty letter, not unlike the one written on 20 October, in which he also refers to estate business.

It is apparent that father was proceeding with the legalities of the entail as laid out in his letter of 7 July 1871 but Sabine was concerned that in the event of his own death without a male child the estate should pass to a male heir and not be broken up and divided between his daughters. The reference to the possibility of brother Willy inheriting confirms the presumption, supported by Sabine's statement to this effect in his diary on 10 Dec 1880, that at this time he was unaware of the seriousness of his brother's condition. It could be that father's concern over Willy's health was a reason why father might have considered not passing the estate to a male heir in the event of Sabine's death without a son.

Grace continued to have a troubled pregnancy and there are further humorous references to the child being an alligator. To help Grace pass the time Sabine read Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall' to her and was 'concerned' that the child, referred to confidently as 'he' will wait until he has heard it all before deigning to be born. It is doubtful that this choice of reading was to Grace's taste.

There is an interesting reference to Sabine having read about the history of the fanatical Anabaptist sect of Münster in Westphalia. He resolved to visit Münster 'next spring,' but it is unlikely that he did so. A visit to Münster does not appear in either the diary or the 1862 family bible and according to his diary the next spring saw him on a family trip to the Meuse. The itinerary was to have continued with the Tyrol and Dolomites but the holiday was curtailed by news of his father's death on 26 May 1872. Sabine therefore did not visit Münster in the spring of 1872, but presumably did so at some point in the ensuing 17 years because his fascinating "The Anabaptists of Münster" took up 174 pages of the second series of "Historic Oddities and Strange Events." This was first published in 1889 before being reissued in 1891 as "Freaks of Fanaticism and Other Strange Events." The Anabaptists also feature in chapter 36 of his book 'Germany' first published in 1887.

It seems certain from the entry in the family bible for 1871 that work on 'Lives of the Saints' began in that year and comments in this letter imply that, by 12 Nov 1871, he had been working on the 'Lives' long enough to discover that it involved a large amount of work, much of it monotonous.

DRO12: Sabine to father

East Mersea Rectory
Colchester
22 Nov. 1871

My dear Father

Many thanks for the cheque which has all arrived safely. I return you the draft.⁵¹ I think it had better be altered, though there may be no real necessity for it, as I have now a son, but I would not have Lew property broken up for anything, so it may as well at once be secured, now that an entail is being made out, in the event of my boy dying or not having male heirs.

Grace is getting well over her troubles, and the child promises to be vigorous in health and stalwart in body. It is astonishingly firmly knit, and with such sturdy limbs. It is impossible to say yet who he will be like.

I have written to Emily, to ask her to come and stand sponsor for it. Theodore cannot get away from Cawston I am sorry to say. I wish Willy would come but I cannot get him here, whenever I invite him I get a very curt refusal, however I will try once again. Grace is on the sofa by the fire, and at her knitting already. She is such an active little body that she cannot be kept from doing something.

Love to all

I remain yours t'ly

S. Baring Gould

Comment:

Edward was born just 5 days before this letter was written. The purpose of the cheque is not known. Sabine repeated the firm view expressed in a letter to his father just 10 days previously that the entail be altered, although now he had a male heir there was less immediate concern.

It seems that Theodore Marsh and his wife, Sabine's sister, Margaret, were unable to come to East Mersea and stand sponsor for the baby. Sabine then asked Emily, presumably his unmarried cousin, daughter of Uncle Charles Baring-Gould, instead.

Sabine painted a charming verbal picture of Grace sitting by the fire, knitting and his description of her as "such an active little body she cannot be kept from doing anything" gives a rare but nice insight into her personality.

The comment on Willy's curt refusal to attend the baptism, which took place at East Mersea on 10 December, reflects Sabine's ongoing distress and bewilderment at Willy's odd behaviour without knowledge of its cause.

⁵¹ Draft: settlement and entail

DRO13: Sabine to Father

*No address or date but, from the content, the address is clearly the Rectory, East Mersea and the date probably early 1872 from the reference to the January edition of 'Lives of the Saints published in 1872. Father died unexpectedly from a stroke on 26 May 1872 when Sabine and Grace were on holiday on the Meuse as described in Sabine's Diary on 10 Dec 1880.*⁵²

My dear Father

I suppose by this time you have had the January vol. Of my "Lives of the Saints," the first edition of a thousand was sold out two days before it was published, that is orders for over a thousand, which was the first edition, oversold before the book was bound and ready. It is sure now to be a success. I am glad of it as I have taken great pains over it. It is not a book you would care to read, or one that anyone would read through any more than a dictionary, for it is in fact a biographical dictionary of all the famous personages who have lived in the Church. It will contain about three thousand six hundred biographies when complete, and I leave you to guess the labour it is to get accurate dates and other matters, such as the squaring of two or three contemporary accounts with one and other.⁵³

Grace is not very well, having a fall or bearing down of the womb, and the doctor has ordered her to lie on her back for some time, this is a great affliction to her, especially as we have servants who cannot be trusted to do things unless looked after. I have written to Emily at Cawston⁵⁴ to beg her to kindly come here for a few weeks and be housekeeper for Grace.

I have just got into a fight about the children and scarlet fever which is in the parish. I hope they will escape it. I have drawn a cordon around the garden but cannot trust the nurse not to overstep it and go amongst the cottages.⁵⁵

I am nursing a multitude of chickens,⁵⁶ I have the earliest brood in the parish, they spent the first week in the nursery with the children, and made a nest of my wide-awake.⁵⁷ They are now in the hay loft and thriving.

Baby [*Edward*] is growing quite a man, he is 2 foot 4 in high, and looks very wise so we call him Solomon. He and Margaret have both got well shaped large heads and I fancy they will prove chock-full of brains.

Give my love to Livy and the children.⁵⁸

I remain yours very affectionately

S. Baring-Gould

⁵² Wawman R. *Never Completely Submerged, the Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould*, pp 81-2

⁵³ One wonders how Sabine's father responded to *Lives of the Saints*

⁵⁴ Sabine's sister, Margaret lived at Cawston. It is assumed he was referring to cousin Emily, daughter of his uncle, the Rev. Charles Baring-Gould. If so why was her address given as Cawston? It could be a slip of the pen but it is possible that Emily was staying with her cousin, Margaret.

⁵⁵ The description of a cordon to limit the spread of scarlet fever is reminiscent of the 1890 outbreak at Lew covered in *The Diary of Sabine Baring-Gould* in entries between 11 Aug and 11 Oct 1890. Also graphically described in *Church Monthly* Jan to April 1898.

⁵⁶ The reference to chickens in the nursery suggests a somewhat casual but quite common rural approach to domestic arrangements.

⁵⁷ Wide awake: Wide-brimmed felt hat

⁵⁸ Step-mother, Lavinia and his half-siblings Arthur, aged 6, and Leila, aged 2

DRO14 Sabine to his sister, Margaret Marsh

Dear Margaret

You have made a great muddle. Mary is going to marry Mr Dickinson, Leila⁵⁹ a Mr Carver.

You are also in great mistake about Arthur.⁶⁰ He has had nothing to do with your money except instructing a broker[?] withdrawing £100 at your wish from some investment and it was paid over by the broker to the Colchester bank in your name and you used it. The money never even passed his hands. As to £300 invested in the Banbury and something⁶¹ Railway that pays dividends neither Arthur nor I have ever had the securities you put them in the hands of Mr Robinson, and I absolutely refused to have to do with any of your money when you wanted to be rid of the responsibility. Whether you ever got rid of him when you were in that queer condition among those queer people from which you were removed to Earl's Court, I cannot say. You were not then accountable for your acts. You had then even pawned your jewelry for the tickets were found about in your room.

Yours t'ly

S. Baring Gould

Lew Trenchard

N. Devon

Nov. 24/92

Comment:

Dealing, as it appears to do, with payments from the estate this letter is surely to Sabine's sister, Margaret, who married Theodore Marsh rector of Cawston in Norfolk. It is patently not to his daughter Margaret and I know of no other Margaret towards whom the estate would have a responsibility in 1892.

This letter implies that at some time Margaret had become mentally unbalanced while living in unusual circumstances from which she was removed. It is possible she was admitted to an asylum in Earl's Court, London. There was a private asylum for young ladies at Earl's Court House (known as Mrs Bradbury's Establishment for Ladies only nervously affected) in the early 19th century but this had closed by 1870. It is possible the asylum continued elsewhere under another name but was still referred to as 'Earl's Court.' If so, no trace of it has been found.

Margaret's episode of mental unbalance could not have occurred before 1872, as Sabine would not have had financial responsibilities towards members of the family before inheriting the estate. In any case as late as 1871 he wrote to his father to say that he had asked Margaret and her husband to stand sponsor at the baptism of Edward. It is known from his diary, 5 January 1881, and inferred from DRO01 above, that Sabine regarded Margaret's marriage as 'unfortunate.' Enquiries by Keith Lister found no trace of Margaret's existence at Cawston. She does not appear in the parish register and there is no mention of her in the obituary of her husband

⁵⁹ Mary was Sabine's eldest child and Leila, his half-sister. They were married in January 1893 and April 1893 respectively.

⁶⁰ Arthur Baring-Gould: Sabine's half brother.

⁶¹ Presumably the Banbury and Cheltenham Railway

who died at Cawston in 1905 and is buried there. There is no written material about Margaret at Cawston and she is not buried there.

It is known from an insurance policy held in the personal and family box in the Baring-Gould archive at the Devon Record Office that in 1882, Margaret, then aged 45, was living at The Wells, Ripon, Yorkshire. In a Post Office savings book also held there, her address in 1885 is given as 3 Park Row, High Road, Knightsbridge and withdrawals were made at the Sloane Street Post Office —both addresses not very far from Earl's Court.

Her death certificate throws further light. She died on 13 December 1903 at 10 Harsnett Road, Colchester, Essex at the age of 66. On the certificate she is described as wife of Theodore Marsh Clerk in Holy Orders. Bearing in mind that the 1892 letter mentions a Colchester Bank it is possible that Margaret was already living in that town then.

The cause of death is given as cirrhosis of the liver 4 years, dropsy 4 months and exhaustion. Her maternal aunt, M R Bond of 4 Colleton Crescent, Exeter was entered as in attendance at the death. The 1881 census for 4 Colleton Crescent has Marianne H Bond, aged 51, who in 1903 would be aged 73. It is evident from Early Reminiscences, chapter 17 that this is Marianne K Bond, known to Sabine as 'Aunt Kate.' Aunt Kate, with whom Sabine had a close relationship, would have given details of the death to him (and possibly have returned this letter to him) and Sabine made a brief note of his sister's death in the 1862 Bible. It is not known if Sabine attended the funeral.

From all the above it can be inferred that Margaret had been separated from her husband for at least 21 years before her death. Sabine patently neither approved of the company she had kept nor her behaviour. From the tone of the letter it is probable that her mental health problems were seen by Sabine as self-inflicted. The diagnosis of cirrhosis of the liver brings to mind the possibility of chronic alcoholism as a possible cause of the cirrhosis and a possible factor, together with marital failure, in the causation of her mental health and financial problems.

The Bond maternal aunts had frequently visited and taken holiday with the Baring-Goulds. They had given financial support to Sabine in 1861 and, more substantially, in 1880. They had supported Willy during his long terminal illness before he was hospitalised in 1875, and had nursed both Sabine's mother Sophia and his sister Margaret during their last days. Sabine stayed with aunt Kate, then aged 96, at 4, Colleton Crescent, Exeter for Christmas 1922,. (Miscellaneous Lewdown letters, Sabine to Miss Hilda Piper, 1922-12-23; Sabine letter to Miss Evelyn Healey 1922-12-13) This much, and more, is known. The family ties were very close.

Letter DRO15 Sabine to an aunt

Lew Trenchard House
 N. Devon
 July 13th

It is not possible from the contents to date this letter any more precisely than definitely prior to Sabine's father's death in 1872. From the address, time of year and the same sort of preoccupation with portraits as was displayed in letters to his mother, it could have been written while he was home on summer holiday from Hurstpierpoint and probably before his mother's death, ie between 1858 and 1863.

My dear Aunt

I have a great favour to ask of you, and am in a great state of excitement about it. Mrs Emsley has got a picture of old Mr Baring. We want just that one as it would fill the gap between William Drake Gould and my grandfather. Somehow Mrs Jackson got possession of it and from her Mrs Emsley obtained it. Now it can be of no possible interest to her as he was no relation and it would be a great thing for us to have it; could you find something out about it and learn whether the Emsleys value it, perhaps it may be put aside with lots of old lumber. I tried to get Aunt Emily⁶² at Teignmouth to write but there was some difficulty in it. You are a great friend of Mrs E are you not? Do try to find out about the picture, perhaps they would resign it if Papa was to paint them a large Pyrenean one. Best love to all

I remain your affectionate nephew

Sabine Baring Gould

Comment:

It has not been possible to identify to which aunt this letter was sent but from the Baring and Teignmouth context and the mention of aunt Emily Baring-Gould, it is likely she was another paternal aunt. Nor have Mrs Jackson and Mrs Emsley been identified.

⁶² Emily Baring-Gould, b. 3 April 1812.