

Richard Greaves. *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. xix + 693 pp. \$75.00. Review by U. MILO KAUFMANN, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN.

It is difficult to imagine anyone doing a better job than has Richard Greaves at the several tasks he has set himself in this masterful biography of John Bunyan. The author undertakes to discuss every one of Bunyan's published works, locating each to the fullest extent possible both in time and in place, while drawing all the accessible details about Bunyan's life and the turbulent historical context into a coherent narrative.

Greaves' credentials are impeccable, with his earlier works on English nonconformity and his editorial contributions to period scholarship well known to those in the field. He gives the impression of having read everything of possible relevance in English mid-century religious and political controversy, and often adduces illumination for well-known features of Bunyan's major works. This last achievement is, of course, the legitimation of historical scholarship for all those among us who see themselves more as practical critics and aestheticians than as historians. Given the fact that the vast majority of Bunyan's works have very little literary value, one might wish for somewhat more attention to questions of significance, which naturally point beyond the particularities of who preached where and when to those currents of new ideas so insuppressibly dynamic in Bunyan's time, as well as to the enduring mystery of genius which means in Bunyan's case that we attend to a mass of dated material because it came from the hand of one who fashioned a handful of masterpieces.

Yet it is as a historian that Greaves presents his study and his history documents a time in English affairs when a compromise of enormous current importance was taking shape. How is a political state to be defined so that religious diversity is fully accommodated? England at the time of its civil war and for three decades thereafter was a kind of laboratory for mixing volatiles without

some terminal explosion, and planet Earth in the twenty-first century seems to be much the same on the grand scale.

It is the cumulative weight of the minutiae which make Greaves' narrative of Bunyan in the context of English dissent so effective an evocation of the fearsome disorder of the time. Greaves takes us well beyond the three-way split among Catholics, Church-of-England communicants and sectarians or dissenters, apprising us of such a diversity of passionate conviction that one can appreciate the relief that must have attended the compromises of the 1680s. It is true that the temper of Christiana's journey is quite different from that of Christian's, and the causes appear to lie in a change of religious climate, as well as in a development in Bunyan's own spiritual pilgrimage.

The development I refer to is one of the several themes which organize Greaves' biography. I list three, and return to the first for a moment's discussion. Greaves risks the perils of practicing psychological diagnosis from a remote vantage point and makes a persuasive case for Bunyan as a depressive, by strict medical definition. *Grace Abounding* provides a wealth of evidence and there are abundant hints elsewhere, including Christian's pilgrimage. Interestingly, in Part Two of the allegory, Doubting Castle is destroyed and Giant Despair slain. The episode, in keeping with the tenor of Part Two, argues for a late triumph on Bunyan's part over a psychological and spiritual malady which plagued him for decades. The merit in Greaves' analysis is that it can alert us to easily-slighted details in Bunyan's allegories, for example, Christian's moment of panic in death's river; though Celestial City is in sight, and the dramatic reversals of fortune in Mansoul during the Holy War. (I recall a story by Lionel Trilling in which a student refers to the confectionery world of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, missing the tone altogether, and recall, as well, an older study of Bunyan referring to the pervasive joy of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Joy, yes, but Greaves would have us take the despair as real and recurrent.)

In addition to the theme of Bunyan's depressions and his eventual cure, Greaves stresses the theme of Bunyan's evangelical Calvinism or "pastoral Arminianism" and also the theme of his concern

for the poor. The first theme calls attention to the outworking of Calvinist theology in a practice which stressed the freedom to respond and the need to strive. As with so many paradoxes of faith, practice reconciled the contraries. The second theme is prominent in Greaves' review of Bunyan's later works, especially the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The common reading of Christiana's journey notices the frailty and weakness of the pilgrims, but Greaves provides a corrective, noting those who show courage, whatever their names, and noting as well the more important fact that they are poor folk who are making successful pilgrimage.

Every one of Bunyan's works is discussed, with valuable insights about Bunyan's exegetical method, his mastery of vivid imagery, his staunch personal and doctrinal integrity. In addition to a chronology which lines up more than a hundred texts or editions of texts, the reader is offered an epilogue including a fine review of Bunyan's reputation among writers and others of note after his death.

No review, I suppose, is taken seriously if it does not include a critical comment or two, so I oblige. The title, *Glimpses of Glory*, is misleading, since it suggests that more by way of heavenly vision will be discussed, particularly since heavenly-mindedness was such a prominent and carefully-cultivated discipline of Bunyan's century. Perhaps one is to assume that the stress is on "glimpse," with only glimpses of glory possible in the tempestuous polemical milieu which Greaves documents. The index is lengthy, but better for names than for ideas. One or two ideas which I came across without making a marginal note I later found I could not locate in the text since the index listed none of the key elements. Greaves does not disguise the reality of Bunyan's prejudices with respect to women and persons of color. He might have done more to suggest how it was that, even so, in a distraught and polarized time, Bunyan showed an uncommonly generous spirit.