

Book Reviews

N. H. Keeble, John Coffey, Tim Cooper, and Tom Charlton, eds., *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ Or, Mr Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times*, 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

The first scholarly edition of Richard Baxter's autobiography is an incredible achievement. The five volumes are meticulously edited and annotated by preeminent scholars in the history of dissent, offering an unparalleled exploration of key sources, not only for studying Baxter's life and thought, but also for understanding the religious and political landscape of seventeenth-century England. As one of the most enduring figures of dissenting literary culture, Baxter's sometimes painful habit of reflection on matters from the nationally important to the most prosaic has been a gift to students of Puritanism. Compared to many other figures of great interest to today's academics, pastors, and laymen—such as his rival John Owen—we know an astonishing amount about Baxter's inner-life, his activities, and the way he viewed his world. Yet, despite the many editions of *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ* that have appeared since its first publication in 1696, this is the first edition that does justice to his original text, and which will allow the reader to enter more easily into what is both a labyrinthine memoir, and a polemic for what Baxter saw as moderate Puritanism under attack from competing historiographies of Revolutionary and post-Restoration Britain.

As the editors explain in the introductory sections in volume 1, Baxter's work underwent significant change between his original text and the first printed edition. Substantial changes are documented thoroughly in volume four and offer many striking examples of alterations by Baxter's first editor, the nonconformist minister Matthew Sylvester (ca. 1636–1708). Many of these changes have a significant impact upon our understanding of Baxter's opinions of people and events, for instance by presenting his opinion of

John Owen's involvement in the events of Richard Cromwell's downfall in a worse light than suggested through the diplomatic edition of these sections under Slyvester. By going back to the surviving manuscripts and restoring these changes, the editors have produced a text which is more interesting and more faithful to Baxter.

The edition rearranges a great deal of documentary material originally included in the narrative into their own volumes. As those interested in the book and reception history will always need to return to earlier editions, this seems a sensible decision to enhance usefulness and navigability, particularly for those who may be accessing it who are not Baxter specialists. Anyone who has tried to navigate editions in special collections departments or through accessing *Early English Books Online* have encountered the issue of tracking Baxter's own reflections and his chronology while coming across his sometimes-small treatise-length insertions. To have them gathered into one place, while linked to the narrative through the scholarly apparatus, not only makes the text more readable, but allows readers to take in at a glance the array and types of material Baxter was dealing with at different points of his life. While this is not the way that historical readers encountered *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, or the way in which Baxter arranged his own material, the editorial decision is well-argued and provides a helpful model for creative ways that early modern documents may be edited to the highest scholarly standards while sensitively and responsibly recognizing such claims as accessibility. Every edition is by nature a production for a particular purpose, and generations of Baxter scholars, and those with access to a good seminary or university library will be grateful for the tools placed at their disposal in this text.

The general introductions, expository, historical and literary apparatus, including extensive entries on figures on whom Baxter makes comment, make this edition an outstanding resource for scholars of a wide range of subfields in seventeenth-century history. The apparatus is a powerful tool for mining the wealth of Baxter's experiences and reflections that have previously been obscured or difficult to parse in its original printed form. The biographical feature is especially helpful in providing a step before a full *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* search by providing the essential information in relation to Baxter's purpose in invoking a particular person.

This edition of *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ* is a landmark publication that will serve as a valuable tool for scholars and the committed Baxter reader. It offers a richly annotated and carefully edited text that illuminates Baxter's fascinating, tedious, frustrating, and sometimes surprising reflections

on his social, political, and ecclesiastical context. For scholars, this edition provides an indispensable resource for detailed study and analysis. For the dedicated minister who may be reading editions of Baxter's pastorally oriented works, it offers a wealth of insight into his practical experiences and his evaluation, clear-eyed or otherwise, of his own and other's actions. Sylvester's unfortunately deficient edition of Baxter's mammoth project lasted for over three centuries. By preserving and reprinting Baxter's autobiography, this will be the edition through which *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ's* place in accounts of seventeenth-century Puritanism and wider histories of the period will receive its due recognition for what will hopefully be centuries to come.

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John Morrill, Andrew Baclay, Tim Wales, Elaine Murphy, Micheál ó Siochru, Jason Peacey, Joel Halcomb, Patrick Halcomb, Patrick Little, and David L. Smith, eds., *The Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

This new edition of Oliver Cromwell's letters, writings, and speeches has satisfied the longstanding need of both academics and general readers for a scholarly, reliable, and accessible version of the much-loathed and much-loved champion of the Puritan Revolution. Through over one thousand texts, the editors have made a profound contribution to the study of Cromwell and of the wide variety of historiographies he informs by replacing the previous mixed attempts at compiling such an edition. The work of the nineteenth-century historian, Thomas Carlyle, in the earliest collection of Cromwell's writings is well-known for including the editor's own musings. By modern critical standards, this reduces the edition to be itself a subject of study rather than a usable edition of Cromwell's own materials. The work of Sir Charles Firth and Sophia Lomas greatly improved Carlyle's reliability through new manuscripts but still followed his edition as a base text. Wilbur Cortez Abbott was the third scholar to work on the Cromwell project. While his edition remains useful for the sheer amount of material included, this feature is also its main weakness. The value of Cortez's work was diminished by a lack of rigor in distinguishing documents in which