Review.

THE FINALITY OF CHRIST, by S. B. John (Kingsgate Press, 5s.).

PROF. T. W. CHANCE commends this book in an enthusiastic Foreword, which, unlike some tutorial commendations, is thoroughly deserved. Mr. John is to be congratulated on a work which does honour to the whole Baptist ministry. He has read very widely, and he has poured the result of his reading and thought into this tightly-packed book. It is a veritable storehouse of facts and figures and relevant quotations. It is written with an energy and conviction which rise at times to genuine eloquence. Mr. John holds the attention of the reader from the first page to the last; and, considering the many subjects with which he deals and the mass of his material, this is a remarkable achievement.

The aim of the book, as the author explains, is "to present Jesus Christ as the focus of all thought and of all life, the crown of all science and of all humanity, the clue to the meaning of this tragic world, and the Redeemer from its sorrow and sin." It will be seen that there is a Miltonic spaciousness in the task to which Mr. John has applied himself; and, if for nothing else, he is to be admired for the courage which has dared so vast an undertaking. A glance at the contents of his book is enough to prove how greatly he has planned and laboured. It opens with a chapter on "The decay of religious belief," in which the world from China to Peru is surveyed, land by land, Christian and non-Christian—a chapter crowded with quotations and statistics which make depressing reading. This, however, is followed by a convincing chapter on "The need and permanence of religion." Then Mr. John plunges into his great theme, and in four compressed chapters Christ is exhibited as the Truth of Science; of Philosophy; of Psychology; and of Comparative Religion. Here there is an account and criticism of the Animistic Faiths; of Confucianism; of Hinduism in its various aspects; of Buddhism; and of Mohammedanism. Then follow chapters on Christ as the Norm of Humanity; as the Way of Life; as the Life; on the Achievement of Christ; and on the Way Forward. In these closing chapters the author rises to his height as he expounds the Revelation and Work of Christ, and challenges the Church to be faithful in this new age to her divine mission. All the chapters are abundantly fortified with quotations, and there

are a number of useful appendices in which much out-of-the-way information is given.

Here indeed is God's plenty. Mr. John anticipates the most obvious comment when he confesses that "the treatment is suggestive rather than exhaustive." How could it be otherwise when this enormous field is covered in a book of 280 pages? The work is so well done that it would be churlish to complain that occasionally one is out of breath with the swiftness of its movement, and would cry halt! for further discussion of many things, for the clearing up of difficulties, even for challenging questions. Is it true, for instance, that bribery and corruption among the ruling classes in China is due to the moral limitations of Confucianism? One has heard of such things outside China. Is it true that the polytheism of India is a popular "recoil" from abstract Pantheism? Is it true that the Moslem peoples have not revealed any great capacity for a high state of civilisation? What of the Moors in Spain? There are very many questions the book raises in detail. But under a competent leader what an excellent handbook for an advanced Study Circle!

The finest chapters, as we have said, are the closing ones; and there is so much that is nobly thought and felt in them, that one is loth to criticise. Yet such a sentence as this: "Pain, suffering, death, may be eliminated from consideration, for these may be shown to be related to a darker fact, i.e., moral evil or sin," (218), suggests that Mr. John does not sufficiently realise that there are mysteries in human life which remain even under the Christian revelation, for all the facts of "pain, suffering, and death" cannot be explained in this easy manner. He is arguing that "only the conception of God as love provides any rational explanation of the problem of evil." He has in view the necessity of freewill, which accounts for his statement about pain. It does not occur to him that, in a sense, it is the conception of God as love that deepens the mystery of suffering. But even accepting his explanation, it is not consistent with the conception of the love of God one receives from his book. It would be unjust to say of so virile a writer that he tends to sentimentalise the love of God, yet it would not be wholly misleading. "Jesus did not make God different; He revealed Him. In Him the thunder of the eternal was subdued to the whisper of love, and, in pleading accents the great invitation was given, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (224.) This is beautifully said, but is it the whole truth? Dr. Forsyth once wrote, "Truly we cannot exaggerate the love of God, if we will take pains to first understand it." And behind Mr. John's conception is the idea of God as the Great Non-resister, an idea of which the Cross is the "final expression." (207.) This does

not do justice either to the Gospel story or the New Testament teaching on the Death of Christ, or to our Lord's own words in which He spoke of the divine reactions against sin. There is such a thing, according to Him, as the unforgivable sin, and the "damnation of hell." "All these texts about Gehenna, rejection and retribution," says Lenwood in his pathetically sincere and limited book *Jesus, Lord or Leader,* "arouse the same sense of disquiet. They represent justice as it was then conceived. But they do not fit the Christian conception of God." It may be so. And it may be that it is the "Christian" conception that needs correcting. But there undoubtedly was this stern and terrible element in the teaching of Jesus, and it does not fit in with Mr. John's conception of the love of God as exclusively "non-resisting" in its methods. One may dare to believe that "law" may be effective in awakening souls where "grace" has failed; or, rather, that love will spare no pains, either to itself *or to the sinner* rather than let evil triumph; but we cannot, in view of the teaching of Jesus, eliminate the darker possibilities or minimise the judgment of God on sin. Much the same thing may be said of Mr. John's interpretation of Christ's teaching on non-resistance, though he does not carry it to its logical conclusion as Lloyd Garrison and Tolstoi did, and call upon the Church to "contract out" of organised society on the ground that all government rests on or must use compulsion. On the contrary he exults in the harvest of Christian legislation, and anticipates still greater triumphs in the State. It is not necessary to accept his views on "non-resistance" to join whole-heartedly with him in his denunciation of war as the method of settling international disputes, and to work and pray for peace.

Mr. John's book is so good, even where it is provocative, it is such a tonic to faith and courage, that it is to be hoped it will receive from his brother ministers the recognition it deserves.

B. G. COLLINS.

A RELIGIOUS BOOK WEEK will be held from 11 to 17 October, for the first time in England. The project is smiled upon by Dr. Charles Brown, Moderator of the Federal Council of the Free Churches, and the National Book Council has enlisted a committee drawn from leaders of all denominations. It is clear that there is a fair sale for Yankee magazines at threepence, and novels at sixpence; the question is whether publishers will have the enterprise to push cheap editions of Pett Ridge, Harold Begbie, and other men who can made religion interesting.