

on the Western powers to make in face of the present grave situation. The world is hungry: it is dangerous to delay too long.

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**THE LIFE AND WORK OF SOPHOCLES.** By F. J. H. Letters. (Sheed and Ward; 18s.)

This is the second Sophoclean study from New South Wales within three years, but not so stimulating and commendable as Professor Waldock's. Such merits indeed as it contains are compromised by the errors in its opening chapters, which are so gross and damaging to Athens and to Sophocles that we are obliged immediately to correct them.

Passing over such oddities as the reference to Cybele (p. 1) and the description of Nausicaa's game of ball as rounders (p. 39), and the misprint Athens for Athena (p. 20 fin), we notice Hippodamus described as Themistocles' engineer (p. 5): it was of course for Pericles that he town-planned Piraeus in the modern American manner. Marathon (p. 55) should be Salamis (correct on p. 38) for Sophocles' first public appearance. He died in 406, at ninety, and if he sometimes sighed for his lost youth and at the burdens of age, to argue that he was obsessed with the subject (pp. 57-60) is as exaggerated as to say (p. 58) that this feeling was 'peculiar to Athens'. That Athenian education, compared with Roman, neglected the three R's (p. 38) is just untrue: every Athenian learned to read, write and calculate; they were perhaps more literate than we succeed in being today.

Mr Letters is very preoccupied with Athenian morality. His indignation leads him to wildly mistaken judgments on the Athenian attitude to women, marriage and the family, to put the Athenian birth-rate impossibly low, to say that infanticide was rife and that only the desire for posthumous offerings induced the Athenian to marry and have children at all. He jibes at the Athenian ephebe as 'more feminine in manner and feature than a boy should ever be', and mutters that 'Greek athleticism was not inconsistent with youthful effeminacy, a truth that modern worshippers of athletics might well ruminate'. What nonsense this all is! A. W. Gomme has proved that Athenian women had substantial freedom, influence and respect, the birth-rate was exceptionally high, 'higher than in modern Greece' (*Population of Athens*, Blackwell, 1933); infanticide there is improbable, nearly every Athenian was married, and had considerably more than two children as a rule. Even Letters (p. 53) admits that Sophocles had four sons and probably as many daughters; in fact, his population statistics (p. 10) are at least 100 per cent too low: Gomme gives for Attica in 431 B.C., 172,000 citizens, 28,500 metics, and 115,000 slaves. That manual labour was necessarily abhorrent to a freeborn Athenian (pp. 30-1) was dismissed long ago as a 'grotesque' idea by Zimmern (*The*

*Greek Commonwealth*); they worked in factories and on the land, and through the fifth century a large number of Thetes, and very few slaves at all, were oarsmen in the Fleet.

Mr Letters judges Sophocles to have been a perverted hedonist, but he fails, except verbally (p. 67 fin), to reconcile this moral depravity with the spirituality and nobility of his works. The Catholic distinction between formal and material sin, and the concept of invincible ignorance do not occur to him. But need we really, with him, accept the theory of Sophocles' moral obliquity? The anecdote he makes so much of (pp. 41-2) need not be so ill interpreted (cf. Sir C. Mackenzie's *Pericles*). Mr Letters' comment on Plato's Rep. I, 29, that the Poet's joy to be free of the tyranny of Eros is undoubtedly 'an allusion to the homosexual friendships of the palaestra' is only an undoubted proof that he has not studied the text.

The only damning witness against Sophocles is Hieronymus Rhodius (300 B.C.), whom page 51 professes to quote *ipsisimis verbis* from Athenaeus. Actually page 51 gives only a brief epitome, more damaging than the extensive original since it multiplies the occasion ('at times he committed greater excesses') and omits its suspicious vulgarity. Studying that original, what are we to say? It is a quotation in c. 200 A.D. of an alleged story of 300 B.C., about a man who died a hundred years earlier. It is the only suggestion of moral turpitude against him; there is no hint even in Aristophanes. Let Sophocles on the other hand speak in his own defence. Read the plays, consider the wonderful women he created, savour his extraordinary spiritual and ethical purity. Remember that he died the father of a large family and reputedly still fond of the company of women. Surely we may recognise the libel for the scurrility that it is, and prefer the verdict of his fellow-citizens, who soon after his death were venerating him with an altar as a sort of demigod or saint.

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RIMBAUD'S ILLUMINATIONS. By Wallace Fowlie. (The Harvill Press; 18s.)

For Mr Fowlie, 'Poetry is one of the principal methods of preparation by which man tries to change his being into an angelic being' (p. 134), and it is from this point of view that he studies Rimbaud, regarding him more as a kind of Prometheus than as the adolescent of genius in revolt against the *condition humaine*, of more pedestrian but more convincing literary criticism. The theory of angelism does not really seem to bring us any nearer to understanding the poet who said bitterly, 'Moi! moi que me suis dit mage ou ange . . .' (*Une Saison en Enfer*), when at last he came to some sort of terms with reality.

The value of this book lies in the closely-knit and highly sensitive analyses of the prose-poems of the *Illuminations*, grouped according to