

THE BATHS OF ABSALOM. By James Pope-Hennessy. (Allan Wingate; 7s. 6d.)

The title of this elegantly written and printed apostrophe refers to the ravine in Martinique where, without undue savagery, though with a fine discernment for the ministry of the five senses, it was composed. Its purpose is to suggest a damning and conscience-stirring contrast between the dreadful social conditions in the British possessions of Santa Lucia and Dominica and the atmosphere of life and vigour in French Martinique. For this contrast as an artistic achievement, it well deserves to be read. Whether it is quite so successful as propaganda is another question. The suburbanism of the British West Indies, 'redolent of Peckham or Tulse Hill', may seem only too obviously lacking in healthy administrative promise when placed beside the self-assured adaptation of the Post Office girl in Martinique: '*Mais, monsieur, vous êtes en France*'. But unfortunately the very readers who should be most embarrassed by it are likely to conclude with some irritation that, after all, it is no more than a question of taste. They will readily understand that from the heights of the 'immensely civilized hotel' above the Fontaine d'Absalon some people prefer it the French way.

A.S.

LETTERS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH. Selected by Philip Wayne. (Oxford: World's Classics; 5s.)

It was a good idea to publish a selection of Wordsworth's letters. Wordsworth, as everyone knows, is often unexciting, and in any case the six volumes of Professor de Selincourt's edition are too much for the general reader. Mr Wayne's book has the further merit of drawing on sources independent of de Selincourt, one of them (*Some Letters of the Wordsworth Family* published by Cornell University) appearing after the six-volume edition had been published.

The selection itself shows a clear sense of what is readable and a catholic judgment. The later correspondence is pruned but not too savagely. And there is a useful index of persons addressed.

J.J.

YIELD TO THE NIGHT. By Joan Henry. (Gollancz; 9s. 6d.)

This is a very remarkable and deeply moving book. In very simple language it expresses the thoughts and emotions of a murderess during the last weeks of her life in the condemned cell: her reactions to her present situation and the people she has to deal with, her re-living of the past, of the murder and the events that led up to it, her sick fear as the end becomes daily more imminent. But the book is not just a brilliant evocation of mounting repulsion and terror: the characters are

all vividly alive—the men who figure in Mary Hilton's past, the wardresses, doctors, chaplain, visitor, governor who are her present—and the emotion which gives the story its character is in the last resort less fear than pity. To read the book through at a sitting (and it would be difficult not to) is a harrowing experience; but at the same time one finds oneself at the end echoing the comment of Dr Edith Sitwell, which is quoted by the publishers: 'A masterpiece of human understanding and compassion'.

G.V.

ENGLISH STAINED AND PAINTED GLASS. By Christopher Woodforde. (Oxford University Press; 30s.)

In his preface Dr Woodforde tells us that this rapid survey of English glass from its beginnings to the present day is the forerunner of a larger and more detailed work. Clearly no one is better qualified to write it than he, for few can have anything like the range of his information at their command. Yet this very fact makes the sixty-five pages of text in the present volume seem a little scrappy and disappointing. The chosen limitations of space made it perhaps inevitable that the eight short chapters should be a good descriptive catalogue rather than the genuine introduction to the subject which the publishers' jacket claims. One could scarcely quarrel with Dr Woodforde's decision to omit any account of the technique of making stained glass. But a more systematic treatment of its relation to, and even repercussions on, architecture and the other visual arts was surely desirable. It is, for instance, taken for granted on page one that we shall all understand the significance for European art of what was going on at the abbey of St-Denis in the mid-twelfth century; and perhaps in a general way we shall. But the expert's precision on a few points of detail bearing directly on his subject would have gone far towards fulfilling one of the chief functions of art history, which is to make our eyes more sensitive to modifications of taste and feeling and the way these are effected. The similarly vague references on page 36 to 'Renaissance features' in certain windows leave one longing for a concrete example. It would be misleading to suggest that Dr Woodforde never gives us this desirable particularity. Indeed, wherever he does so, and especially when he warms to his task of defending the study of nineteenth-century glass, his text always comes to life. But what a pity to have illustrated one of the Joshua Price windows in the chapel at Witley Court (pl. 59) without a word on the superb appropriateness of their setting in that little-visited place.

Dr Woodforde's contention is that 'it was in the fourteenth century that English stained glass reached its greatest beauty of colour and design. . . . Stained glass is essentially a Gothic art and it is in this